

Boreal Involvement

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Boreal Involvement

by [Batwynn](#)

Summary

Tony Stark was about to die cold, alone, and on the wrong side of the portal. A certain god stepped in to save him, only somehow they end up stuck together on an all too familiar frozen planet. Loki's magic can send them back to Earth, but what lurks in the darkness... and follows them home?

Notes

Welcome to BI.

This has been my very first fanfic and somehow it's grown into a much larger story. Anyway, I won't take up too much of your time. Read the tags/ warnings before you read.

You can find me on Tumblr as Batwynn. Feel free to come talk, complain, point out mistakes, etc.

WARNING: some language/ violence.
This is M/M

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The Hero

Chapter Notes

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Chpt 1

(The Hero)

There are quite a few ways to defuse a situation.

Perhaps taunting the green beast was not the correct one.

Loki vaguely recalled thinking this as his skull stitched itself back together. He lay on his back in a crater crafted from his own body. The ceiling was a wash of colors as his mind slowly crawled back into clarity. He felt something of a release as his brain and body healed. Barely managing to sit up, Loki felt pricks of sweat break out over his body from the strain of movement. His mind slowly caught up with the events of the past few months, reliving it with gritty clarity.

"What have I done?"

Several miles off the shore of New York, the Iron Man was chasing a nuclear missile. Tony was never what you would call a 'planner'. He didn't make plans, he put two and two together very quickly, causing stuff to happen. He was a genius, after all.

"JARVIS, keep trying Pepper."

He caught up and flew along the underside of the nuke heading towards Manhattan. He already knew where to put the bomb, just as he knew he would probably have to follow it through till the end. His end.

"You know, JARVIS, I'm usually not this heroic." Tony gritted his teeth, trying to keep the nuke steady.

The AI paused before it answered. "That would be untrue sir. You are, after all, statistically considered a hero."

Tony let out a snort, struggling to tilt the nuke up as he approached Stark Tower. "Statistics..." he replied, his jaw clenching as the portal came closer. "At a time like this?"

Loki lurched over to the open deck of Stark Tower. He grimaced at the destroyed city below him, feeling his body start to shake.

"Don't betray me now, not when I need you most," he hissed.

The god's view was suddenly obstructed by a flash of red and gold going up past him. He jumped back, assuming he was being attacked, only to find that the Iron Man was already far past him. The

man was headed straight towards the portal.

Loki was usually one to plan things out carefully. It was in his nature, after all, to lay out long, elaborate tricks. Unfortunately, this time he had no time to plan. If Stark went through that portal, he wasn't coming back unless someone brought him back. Loki didn't feel he particularly owed the man anything, but it just felt *wrong*.

"Odin be damned..."

He looked around desperately for a means to follow Stark until a group of Chitauri flying towards the tower in pursuit of the Iron Man caught his eye. As they approached, Loki steadied himself and leapt from the balcony on to one of the Chitauri's crafts. The god made quick work of the alien before taking control of the steering, giving the craft a burst of speed with his magic. This rescue was about perfect timing, and he had so little time to perfect it.

Gaining altitude, Tony glanced at the image of Pepper on his suit's screen as the call still rang hopelessly. He smiled weakly and thought of how typical this situation was. Of course he wouldn't be able to say goodbye, no one does. Not in reality. Forcing his attention back to the portal that drew ever closer, he muttered to himself, "God dammit..."

Tony could see the twisting mass of the portal as it expanded, the darkness spilling through like a stain in the bright NY sky. A calm settled over him, his last few seconds on Earth spent marveling at the way the clouds formed around the portal.

"Here we go, Jarvis," he said before glancing once more at the unanswered call. Passing through the portal, Tony let go of the nuke. He watched it sail past him into the space and hit the Chitauri's main ship far ahead of him.

"Sir, it...a...ple..." Jarvis' connection stuttered as the suit's systems began to shut down. Tony blinked slowly as his thrusters flickered to a stop, his body drifting back towards the portal. The nuke hit the ship at last, an impressive explosion filling the space with light. He closed his eyes and smiled.

Loki reached the portal as the explosion ripped through the main ship. The lighter craft he was on lost its power immediately after the blast, starting to drop from the sky. He gave it one more push with his magic before propelling himself off the ship and into the portal.

On the roof of Stark tower, Natasha Romanoff had watched Tony enter the portal with the nuke. Just as Steve shouted at her to close the portal, a blur of black and green shot past her.

"Are you guys seeing this?!" she shouted into the com. "It's Loki! Loki is trying to escape through the portal!"

On the ground, Steve glanced at Thor, unable to see what Natasha was shouting about.

Thor peered up at the portal and frowned. "Wait here, I shall pursue him."

Steve spoke calmly into his own com. "Natasha, Thor is coming up to handle it. How much time do you think we have?" He frowned and squinted up at the closing portal, just barely noticing the Chitauri craft that was now falling from the sky. The Chitauri that were surrounding him suddenly faltered and fell to the ground.

Steve muttered to himself, "What's going on? Where did Loki go?"

The magnetic pull of the portal left a tingling sensation on Loki's skin as he propelled himself through it. He was slowly losing velocity, already too far behind Stark to reach him before the portal closed. A shockwave suddenly threw Stark right into Loki's arms, sending them both backwards into the closing portal.

"Fjandinn," Loki hissed through gritted teeth.

They weren't going to make it in time. He wrapped his arms around Stark's bulky armor and held on tightly. His eyes shut. They reached the portal just as it closed around them. Loki's body shuddered under an immense amount of pressure as the sound of rushing water filled the air. There was a final pop before the pressure released them, throwing them against something hard before Loki lost consciousness.

Natasha stared up at the closing portal, biting her lip. The Iron Man had not returned before the last dark wisps of magic disappeared from the sky. A rush of wind blew around her as Thor landed on the roof nearby.

"Lady Widow," he groaned, and stood upright, holding his side tenderly, "Has my brother gone through the portal? Did the Son of Stark return?"

Natasha felt a weight drop in her chest, her eyes unable to meet Thor's.

"They're both still in there..."

In need of a heater

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Language

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NOTE: The words in Italics that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chpt 2

(In need of a heater)

Tony groaned.

I'm dead.

I'm cold and I'm dead.

I'm REALLY cold.

Fuck this, I'm not dead.

Tony opened his eyes and immediately shut them again as the dim light was too much for him. He slowly started opening them up again, his eyelids sticking together with a crust of ice. Tony had heard of this happening in space, at least he thought it did.

Wait, there's no flat surfaces in space. So what am I laying on?

He sat up suddenly, feeling his body creak in protest. Tony grimaced as his joints gave off waves of pain and leaned his head down on one of his knees.

This was worse than any hangover he had ever experienced, including the time he bought a bar and hosted a sleep-over in it. He was struck with the realization that his body was no longer safely tucked into his armor. He looked around, panic welling up in his throat. His suit was compacted into its suitcase form just a few feet away. He let out a relieved sigh that turned into a fit of coughing. A soft, groaning sigh came from somewhere in the shadows beyond his armor. Tony jumped and shuffled back a little against a wall.

Huh...walls.

"Yeah so, you over there in the shadowy like area, how about you stay there while I grab my suit?" Tony flashed a fake grin and shuffled a little closer to his suitcase.

A wheezing chuckle came from the shadow before they spoke, "I would not worry, Stark, I'm not in any condition to harm you. It seems rather contradictory after I saved your life."

Tony's body froze, if being more frozen was possible. He knew that voice, although it was lacking that usual confident, psychotic, bag-of-cats tone.

"*Loki*," he responded, voice low with anger. "What exactly are you doing here?"

Tony felt himself heating up with anger. It hadn't been that long ago that the god threw him out a window. Tony could hear the sneer in the god's voice from across the frigid room.

"*Stark*. Considering you do not even know where we are, I would say you have no right to complain about my being here," Loki replied before emitting another weak wheezing sound.

Tony was a naturally curious creature, and considering that it took a lot to make a god sound weak, he had to investigate. Standing up, still shaky, Tony moved toward the shadowed area. He heard a soft whimper and a shuffling sound as he got closer and realized that Loki was trying to move away from him.

Tony held his hands up to show he was unarmed, seeing as his one and only weapon was packed away right next to him. "Look, Reindeer Games, I'm not gonna' hurt you. I just want to see who I'm talking to."

He shifted closer and peered into the corner, his eyes adjusting to the dim light around Loki's hiding spot. Tony stopped moving forward when he saw the god, pressed up against the cave wall. Loki's skin was blue and his eyes were a dull glowing red.

Uh, That's new.

His eyes followed the small white lines that graced the god's skin, noticing that Loki's body was at a weird angle. Actually, a lot of his body seemed to be bent in all the wrong places. Tony nervously shifted from one foot to the other before creeping closer again to get a better look.

"What's going on, Rudolf?" Tony asked, as he sat down cross legged in front of the god. "I heard from Jarvis that Hulky smashed you around a bit. Is that all from him?"

Loki rolled his red eyes, exasperated. "No, in fact, this is not from your precious *green beast*. I had already healed from that before rushing after you to save *your* sorry, mortal hide. "

Tony smiled at Loki's terms for the Hulk before the rest of the sentence sank in His eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Wait a minute...let me get this straight, *you* saved me? How, and more importantly, *why*?"

Loki glared at him, taking a deep shuddering breath to say something nasty, but closed his mouth again.

Tony arched his eyebrows and scooted closer to the god. "Or you could just, not answer. That's good too cuz', you know, I don't mind being stuck in god-knows-where with a psychopathic, *blue* reindeer." Tony couldn't hold back a smirk at the look in Loki's eyes as he spoke.

Loki hissed through his teeth, "If you could shut your blathering mouth for a moment, I could answer your idiotic questions. Seeing as I have told you twice already that I saved you, I can see this will take some time to get through your dense skull."

Loki took another shuddering breath and glared at Tony once again in a threatening manner. Tony kept his mouth shut, miming a zipper motion over his lips.

"I doubt you could understand the entirety of what I'm about to tell you. I shall try to use *tiny* words." A crease grew in Loki's forehead as a flash of pain crossed his face. He took another shaky breath, before the usual mask of indifference returned to his features.

"When I ...*Fell* from Asgard, from the Bifrost, I fell for a long while. I do not know how long exactly, for it felt like an eternity. After some time passed I fell to a planet much like this one. The Chitauri's leader, Thanos, took me in personally and helped me heal. I was weak from a very long journey through the void and I had old wounds that never healed. What I did not know was that he was slowly gaining control of me. In my weakened state, I did not even notice the power of his own Tesseract seeping into me."

Loki frowned and tried to push himself up higher against the wall before giving up with a painful gasp.

" I t-thought... I truly believed he was trying to help me. I was a fool to even dream of trusting another being again!" Loki's red eyes filled with hatred, glowing more powerfully than before.

Tony felt a mix of pity and fear. It was a puzzling concoction of emotions.

Loki took a deep breath to calm himself and continued, "Thanos pushed my fears away and fanned my desires. He fed me lies and let me drink up his poisonous flattery. All those promises were just weapons in his arsenal to gain control over me. This continued until I was in a rage, a mindless rage...Úlfhéðnar." He muttered the last part with a sick smile.

Tony opened his mouth to ask what the hell a Ulfaderwhatever was but closed it quickly with another glare from Loki.

"I am painfully aware of my actions on Midgard." Loki's face flashed a small grimace before he

continued. "Although, I was not entirely in control. It was as though I were sleep walking. A constant roar in my ears, a goading little whisper telling what to take what is mine and prove my worth. "

Tony was fidgeting from cold and unable to stop himself from interrupting anymore. "You're seriously trying to tell me you were under some alien dude's control this *whole* time? You smiled like you had a sack of cats in your head; meanwhile you destroyed half of New York City. All this and you were just some guys *bitch*? What about the blue eye thing? Your eyes were green when we talked." Tony shut his mouth again, realizing he had said a bit too much.

Let's not comment on the fact that I know his eye color.

Loki sighed and finally managed to push himself up with wall a bit more, as his body was clearly beginning to heal. "I did warn you, ignoramus, that you wouldn't understand me. I ask again for silence so I may finish. Is that much too hard for you?"

Tony rolled his eyes and rolled his hand dramatically for Loki to continue.

The god began again. "I was, indeed, under the control of the Tesseract. Perhaps it was much deeper kind to which your arrow-shooting friend was subject to. The only reason I am even conscious of what I am currently doing is due to the massive trauma to my head after your green beast battered me against the floor."

Loki's face fell into a disgusted sneer and he fell silent. Tony shifted and crossed his arms, waiting for something more from the god. When nothing came, he began, " Soooo...you saved me, because you aren't a crazy sack of ca- "

"ENOUGH WITH THE CATS!" Loki bellowed before falling into a fit of coughing.

Tony couldn't help but laugh, seeing Loki's blue cheeks flush a darker shade of blue. He continued to chuckle as his mind ran through a list of questions.

Why are you a member of the Blue Man Group?

Why did you 'fall' from Asgard?

You still didn't have to save me.

Oh wait, that's not a question..Okay, how about...

"So where the hell are we then?"

Loki glanced at Tony wearily and looked out toward the mouth of the cave.

"We are on my 'home' planet," he said softly, still looking away.

Tony glanced around the freezing cave and frowned. "This is Asgard? I was expecting more...gold...and furs, lots of furs."

Loki scoffed quietly as his face grew more solemn.

"Asgard is not my home." He turned to face Tony again. "Nor, I suppose, is this. I was born here, but I never lived here."

Tony began to worry.

"Where are we, Loki...?"

Loki turned back and looked into Tony's eyes sadly.

"Jötunheim."

"Jotten him?" Tony asked, staring blankly at Loki.

The god winced. "I would prefer if you did not say the name, if you are going to mangle it so."

Tony wasn't listening. His chapped lips pressed together in a thin line of concentration. Loki saw the gears in his head turning, already anticipating what questions were to follow.

"You're Asgardian, right? You are Thor's brother, Odin's son and all that jazz." Tony frowned and started to wiggle around, his butt was starting to freeze to the floor.

Loki swallowed and sat up straighter, looking out the mouth of the cave again. He sat in a tense silence for some time.

"I am *not truly an Aesir of Asgard*. I was born a Jötun, a Frost Giant. I was a whelp, too small to survive this life." Loki gestured at the icy landscape.

"Odin had led an attack here many years ago and decided to bring me home. I was a prize from the war or some precious artifact meant to keep 'peace' between our realms." He let out a bitter laugh, a hint of madness returning.

"I was raised as a brother to Thor, but never an equal. I truly did not mind at first, I enjoyed being council to my foolish brother. I was there for him, to nudge him into the right direction when he went astray. I knew he was lacking a good sense of judgment and a level head. Something that is expected in a king."

Tony scoffed. "Point Break, level-headed. Sure."

Loki frowned, confused for a moment before surmising that the ridiculous appellation referred to his brother.

"Indeed. Even as you have met him now he is already much improved. He was always reckless, running about and starting fights. I sought to teach him a lesson, show him how his actions can have dire consequences." Loki looked down at his hands, flexing his blue fingers slowly. They looked less broken than they had a few moments ago.

He looked up again and frowned at Tony. "I do not often admit to my mistakes. I so rarely make them. "

Tony muttered under his breath, "Attacking Earth; mistake."

Loki continued to stare at Stark for a while before responding. "I never truly wanted to invade your world. Midgard was a means to an end. It could have been any realm. May I continue without further interruption, or do I need to treat you like a child, and silence you myself? "

Tony reflexively leaned away from Loki.

Loki smiled slowly and leaned back against the wall. "We came here, Thor's friends and myself. The attack on Asgard had him riled up, as I intended it to. Of course, Thor began a fight with the Frost Giants until we found ourselves painfully outmatched. I had thought beforehand to warn my father, Odin of our departure. I had hoped he would arrive to fix everything between King Laufey and himself, then bring Thor home to teach him a lesson. It was truly that simple a plan."

Loki's face fell into a frown again, looking down in thought. Tony opened his mouth as if to speak but reminded himself of Loki's threat.

At last, the god spoke up again. His voice was softer. "Before we could return, I was touched by a Jotun. Just an arm, but I watched as my skin changed to blue. I was terrified and confused, as Jotun's flesh typically burns those from Asgard. After our return, I soon found that I was King Laufey's son."

Tony's eyebrows shot up. He opened his mouth in shock, starting to say something, when Loki flicked a hand in his direction. Tony continued to try to speak even as no words came out. He struggled a moment longer before crossing his arms, glaring at Loki and mouthing obscenities.

With a little concentration, Loki pushed his thought into Tony's head.

"Will you behave? Or shall I keep you silenced like a brat?"

Tony gaped at the blue god in front of him, turning as if to look at his ear. The god let out a small bubble of laughter as he watched in amusement.

"You may try to answer me, you know. If you relax a little I shall be able to hear you easier," he thought again to the mortal.

Tony kept his eyes turned down from Loki, his face tense in concentration. In his desperation to hide his thoughts, he projected one rather loudly.

He's gonna see all my back up nicknames that aren't as funny.

He's gonna see all my back up nicknames that aren't as funny.

He's gonna see all my back up nicknames that aren't as funny.

Loki laughed outright, a charming giggle of a laugh that was completely out of place coming from the sober god. Tony found himself smiling. The laugh was infectious.

Loki spoke again into Tony's mind.

"You needn't worry, I will not be probing around in that cesspit you call a brain."

Tony's smile fell and he made a face, finally managing to control a thought.

"Well you can crawl back into your own shit logged-"

Loki spoke out loud, "Yes, yes, may I finish? I am nearly done explaining my self."

Loki eyed him before speaking again, a little more rushed.

"I was confused, angry. I felt betrayed. Of course, nothing went as planned. Thor was banished away to your planet, Odin fell into his sleep, and suddenly I was to stand in as king. I never wanted it, and to know that I never deserved it was..." Loki gritted his teeth. "A *monster* has no place on the throne of Asgard! I had no where to belong in the Nine Realms."

There was a long pause where Loki unclenched his jaw and shifted his weight with a flinch. "I attempted to attack the Jötun. I set a trap to lead them into Asgard and let them believe they would be able to kill the king. I stopped them and I... I may have...killed my real father, Laufey."

Tony couldn't stop himself from thinking loudly.

Patricide.

Ah Well, there were more than a few times where I considered killing my dad too.

Loki quirked an eyebrow at this and tilted his head to one side like a curious animal. Tony watched him, having never seen that sort of expression on the god's face before. It a little too cute for a raving murderer.

Whoa, careful... He might hear that.

If Loki did, he made no sign of acknowledgement.

Tony cleared his mental throat and concentrated on his next thought.

"So, you're a king here? If you are, why are we hiding in a cave?"

Loki sighed and looked down once more, one of his fingers picking at the white lines on the back on his hand. "Because I am the last of the Frost Giants. They died when the Bifrost shattered too late to stop the destruction I unleashed upon them. There is no kingdom here any longer, just an empty planet barely holding itself together."

There was a silence after he spoke that stretched too long to remain comfortable. Loki could tell Tony was starting to feel the cold. He was unsure how he felt about explaining his life's failures to this mortal. A recent ex-enemy, even. Tempted as he was to poke around in Stark's brain, Loki decided to save his magic to heat the cave instead. With a wave of his hand a greenish fire rose from the floor, soon joined by a thick log to keep it burning. He watched Tony's appreciative face and smiled a little at how easy the mortal was to please.

Tony watched the fire spring from the floor and burn alone before a log appeared.

"Magic..."

Loki smiled wider and responded, "Yes, it can be very impressive when it works. Move closer, you are starting to look as blue as I."

Tony shifted closer and took a good look at Loki, his thoughts rushing by at incredible speed. He lost his concentration as his eyes traveled around the god's body. He could see that Loki was unwell, with hollowed eyes and blue skin that still looked pale and dull. Although he looked less like a broken marionette, he was clearly still suffering from severe injuries.

He forced his thoughts away from Loki's condition and focused on something he suddenly realized.

"Wait. Isn't Jota- uh ,here, nowhere near Earth? How did we even get here?"

An impressed expression flashed over Loki's face before settling into a confident smile. "Now, at *last*, you ask a good question. The portal between the Chitauri and your planet had already disconnected. All that was left was a mass of energy and magic. I simply harnessed it and used the power to send us to the first safe planet I could think of. "

It was Tony's turn to look impressed. *"So you sling-shotted it. Nice."*

At this Loki raised an eyebrow and let slip a thought:

Does he even understand the words that he, himself, utters?

Tony laughed, or tried to. He felt his body shake with the laughter, but no sound escaped him. Grinning, he thought,

"Hey, as fun as it is listening to your thoughts, I would like to actually speak again."

Loki flushed with irritation, flicking a finger to undo the spell that silenced Stark. Using magic, even so small a spell, was tiring to him. He cast a weary look over Stark before closing his eyes for a moment. He jumped a little at the sound of Tony's voice.

"Is it some sort of tradition to be blue on your home planet? I mean, I love the blue, you're like a more chill version if a Ninja Turtle. You just don't seem very comfortable like this."

Loki frowned, forbidding himself from opening his eyes. He knew they were still red, another ugly reminder of his monstrosity.

He muttered, "I am unable to keep my typical form due to the temperature and my weakened magic."

He had not wanted to remind the mortal of his feeble state, but had needed to find some excuse for his disgusting form. He felt almost apologetic for showing Stark the monster inside of him.

There was a soft shuffling sound, and Loki felt a presence closer to him. His eyes snapped open, greeted by the liquid brown eyes of Stark. Instead of jumping back, as Loki had expected, Stark stayed right in there.

Tony was leaning over Loki's body, leaving him trapped between the mortal and the wall. Loki did not enjoy the feeling of being trapped.

Feigning calmness, he hissed, "I know your curiosity is *unmatched* by few, but I don't appreciate being stared at like some sort of animal in a cage."

Tony blinked, confusion clear on his face. "That's not how I was looking at you. I wanted to get closer to admire the pattern on your skin. I have every right, as a connoisseur of design."

Tony paused, his eyes slowly moving over Loki's face.

You're

"It's beautiful."

Chapter End Notes

Notes: Úlfhéðnar is a sort of viking berserker

Nowhere to Go

Chapter Notes

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Thank you to Mizstorge for more editing <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chpt 4

(Nowhere to Go)

Loki stiffened, forcing his face to remain impassive. He couldn't trust his voice to not reveal the mixed emotions that swelled inside of him.

There was nothing beautiful about him, a blue creature with rabid looking eyes. His skin flawed with the markings of a monster. His true form was sickening. How could Stark lie about it with such ease?

Oh.

His voice crackling with frustration, he looked Tony in the eye and glowered. "Do not bother to try to flatter me, it is unnecessary. I shall return you to your home as soon as my magic is in full strength. Needless false compliments will only irk me more."

Tony's eyebrows shot up in surprise. The god was actually offering to send him back? Was this kindness a natural state for Loki when he wasn't under mind control? His face hardened as he suppressed a shiver of fear.

No.

Regardless of his lack of control during the attack yesterday...Loki slaughtered an entire race beforehand. He's still a crazed killer, daddy issues and all .

Was it yesterday? How much time has passed since we went through the portal?

I mean, talk about an overreaction. I hated my father but I didn't kill him and, say, his entire scientific staff.

I'm thinking about this way too hard.

Tony glanced back into the god's red eyes and grinned before quickly leaning closer and bumping his nose against Loki's. "Chill out. Oh, wait, I can't say that to you now, can I? Cool your jets?" Tony's face broke into a shit-eating grin. With a snarl, Loki pushed Stark away roughly. "Ah! Hey there Frosty the Snow Man, be gentle," Tony said, laughing as he almost landed in the fire.

Loki snarled again, attempting to stand before he fell back once more against the cave wall. His breath caught in his throat as he slid back down the wall.

Eyes widening in pain, Loki clenched his fists and muttered fiercely, "Bölvaður dauðlega með tilgangslaus tilveru! Getur útlimum rotna burt og innýfli þín eta sig!"

Tony stifled a snort at the torrent of nonsensical words that filled the cave. Loki was clearly swearing in whatever-language-that-was, but as hilarious as it sounded, the god still had magic enough to cut Tony a new one. He held his breath to calm down and focused on the fire.

Loki closed his eyes again, feeling a wave of exhaustion wash over him. He struggled to keep awake, frowning in concentration at the sounds that surrounded him. He could hear the distant sound of water dripping somewhere in the back of the cave. Closer to him, the burning log crackled in short bursts. He held his breath as his concentration shifted to the breathing of the mortal near him. The short breaths of laughter slowed into a more calm pace. Loki breathed out in a long sigh, feeling strangely relaxed. It reminded him of when he and Thor were still children. Thor always fell asleep first, since he wasted so much energy during the day. Loki would listen to his brother's breathing until he fell asleep himself. He focused on the old familiar sounds and felt himself drifting off.

That wasn't entirely the desired effect,

he thought before finally succumbing to sleep.

Tony finally calmed down enough to look at the god again. Much to his surprise, Loki had long since fallen asleep. He openly stared at the battered man in front of him, tracing the raised white lines on the god's skin with his eyes. It truly was magnificent, a form of art. Tony wasn't an admirer of tattoos, but this was something much more intriguing. As a part of Loki's biology, science and art.

I wonder what they feel like.

He didn't have contact with his nose long enough to discern a general body temperature. It had felt chilly, then again everything felt chilly. Tony felt a smile grow as he continued to stare at Loki's face.

How does he manage to pull off blue and handsome?

No. Nope.

Let's stay away from that word.

I should come up with some more Smurf references.

Not that he would understand any of them.

Tony started to feel bored as he looked around the cave, his eyes settling on the metal briefcase. He glanced back at Loki. He could go for an explore before Frosty woke up and sent him home. Tony stood and cracked his back. Wincing, he cast a glance down at the sleeping god. Loki was clearly past the point of anything waking him easily. Tony felt a prick of concern at how still Loki had become. He watched carefully for a moment, finally catching the shallow rise and fall of Loki's chest.

Ok. Not dead. Let's go.

Tony relished the feeling of his suit around him, never realizing how much safer he felt with it on. He wasn't exactly weak, but all these fights with gods were showing him he wasn't exactly immortal either. He cast one last glance behind him at the god before stepping out of the cave.

Wow. Just, wow.

He let out a surprised laugh as he looked at the world around him. The landscape was almost the same deep blue as Loki's skin. Its surface was covered with cracks that opened up into deep crevasses. He could hear the sound of crumbling ice smashing down into the deep. It was way too beautiful to be so empty.

Unstable, frigid, and blue...

Sounds familiar.

He took off, flying toward the first ruins of a structure he could see. Filled with exhilaration to be flying again, Tony vaguely wondered how long he had been asleep, seeing as he had a lot more energy than he should. Having just fought an entire fucking army. Maybe saving New York from being blown up, and oh yeah, saving the world.

Tony spun in the air before landing heavily inside some sort of grand hall. The moment his metal boots touched the floor, long cracks formed around him. It took a second for him to notice he was holding his breath. He let it out and gingerly put a foot forward.

Yep, guess it's safe enough.

He ambled along for a long while in no discernible pattern. He enjoyed looking into some rooms for only seconds, while rooting around others for hours.

After a while he settled into a room filled with scrolls. He was laughing at one of the images of a large blue man doing something that looked suspiciously like peeing on another giant when he heard a panicked voice.

"Stark? Stark?!"

He jumped up and whipped himself around, expecting Loki to be near. Tony kept looking through a few doors before he heard it again.

"Stark!? If you are safe, please answer."

It finally dawned on him, the voice was in his head. Frowning, he readied himself to answer when a wave of words interrupted him.

Oh guðir he left. He's flown off and left me here. Given up. I shouldn't have spoken of... He's gone just like everyone el-

Tony forced a thought as hard as he could.

"Loki?"

There was a long pause before Loki's voice responded.

"Stark...you are still nearby?"

Tony felt a tingling pain in his chest and throat. Loki's voice had gone from panicked shout to an almost a begging whisper. The guy was still healing for christ sake, he probably thought Tony had left him to die there. He clenched his jaw, frustrated with himself for spending so much time exploring.

"I'm coming right back, hold on."

Tony ran through the halls, launching himself through one of the tall open windows. He heard Loki's voice again.

"It's perfectly fine, you needn't come rushing back from your explorations. Just be...careful. Many of the buildings are falling to pieces."

Tony felt a smile creep on to his face as the mouth of the cave came into view.

"Why Loki, are worried about me?"

He landed and shouted happily into the cave, "HONEY, I'M HOME!" A large chunk of ice crumbled from the roof and shattered right in front of him.

Oops.

Loki was standing in front of the fire, his face in shadow. Tony could see how his body was still stooped and weakened. The silence dragged on until Tony lifted his mask and realized he could hear Loki's rasping breaths.

"Oh, hey, Lokes," Tony said as he rushed forward to catch him before Loki's body crumbled to the floor.

Too many raw emotions splayed across Loki's face. In a panic, he pushed himself away from Stark and turned his head away. He refused to let the mortal see more of his weaknesses. Stark's metal arms entangled him once again and he let out a squeak.

"Ouch. Stark, your armor is not exactly comfortable to be embraced in."

Tony chuckled and stepped back, doing something inside the suit that caused it to collapse. Loki watched as the plates of armor crawled off his body in a mildly erotic fashion.

Interesting.

Loki blinked at that thought and frowned, stepping away further from Stark as the man reached out to grab his arms.

Tony gave the god a pointed look. "Stop. Just come here, okay?"

"I do not need your comfort, Stark. I was simply alarmed that you were in danger. I was concerned..." Loki's voice faltered as he looked uncomfortable with where his thoughts were headed. Tony smiled at his stubbornness and pulled him close just as the god's knees buckled from

underneath him. He practically carried Loki back to the edge of the cave. Tony felt he could risk imposing a small comforting thought into the god's mind without being killed.

"It's okay, you're not alone. Trust me, I won't fly off again."

Loki looked into Tony's eyes, his mouth open in surprise. He let out a chuckling sigh before he spoke. "I see you are getting more confident with the mind link." Loki's tone shifted into bitterness, "However, you will be heading back to Midgard soon and I shall ,inevitably, be alone."

Tony huffed and made a face. " *Earth*. Just say Earth so we both know what we're talking about. "

Loki's expression softened with confusion. "Why do we not both say 'Midgard'?"

"I'm not going to use a term given by aliens who don't even live on the damn planet."

Still looking confused, Loki mumbled, "You shall be returned to...*Earth*."

Tony's smile was that of a proud parent. He resisted the urge to pat the god on the head like a good boy. Loki tucked his knees up against his chest and peeked over them at Stark.

Slowly, Tony's thoughts caught up with him. "Wait a minute, what do you mean alone? You're gonna' stay here?"

Loki rolled his eyes dramatically. "I'm not exactly welcome elsewhere in the nine realms. I have what's left of the Chitauri army after me, Odin and his *son* still hunt me for my crimes, and then there is you and your Avengers. Who, undoubtedly, will seek to '*avenge*' your precious Earth." Loki ended with a tiny smirk.

Tony felt his heart drop into his stomach. He really hadn't been thinking straight since he got here. Loki had nowhere to go where he wouldn't be pursued and punished for crimes he may or may not have committed.

What if he came back with me?

I could protect him and over time we could explain to SHIELD and the others that he was under Thanos' control.

Tony cleared his throat and smiled sheepishly, "You can come home with me?"

Loki let out a muffled snort. "What part of both the Avengers and Thor wanting me dead did you not understand? "

Tony pouted. "That's an insult to my intelligence. I know you are a 'wanted criminal', but I would keep you protected in my house until we can explain what happened. My security is the *best* on the planet, although it's not entirely god proof as you may have noticed. I can speak to Thor first, seeing as he still trusts you."

"You are a fool to think he still trusts me!" Loki snapped back at him. "You did not see his face when he first knew of what I am! You may think you know him, your little *pet* thunder-god, but his faith breaks just as easily as mine." Loki swallowed and looked at the fire before continuing. "These events on Earth will not be forgiven. I knowingly attacked before and this time I certain he will find trouble believing I was under a spell."

Tony scooted closer to the god and reached out to tilt Loki's chin upwards. He looked him in the eye. "Loki, he *will* forgive you. Forgiveness for him is as easy as eating an entire box of pop tarts. Which, according to the data provided by one Darcy Lewis, is sickeningly easy. The others may take a lot of time and effort but I am sure once they see..." His voice tapered off at the thought of the two spies being forgiving. "Okay, so maybe Clint and Agent Romanoff will *tolerate* you, but I'm sure the other two will understand. Bruce gets possessed at least once every year by his own biology."

Loki, his face thoughtful, suddenly sat forward a little. Tony jumped but managed to keep his eyes on Loki, trying to calm down. The god looked guarded, as though carefully choosing what to say. "You have said Thor forgives me, the two assassins will tolerate me, and the green beast and the Captain may forgive. What of you, Stark? I have done things to you one ever forgives."

Loki's eyes moved between Tony's brown eyes and mouth, searching his face for honesty. Tony frowned and before he could answer, Loki mistook his expression as a 'no'. The god's face fell, showing a sadness Tony had not thought the god was able to express.

Still frowning Tony quietly answered, "I've *already* forgiven you."

Chapter End Notes

In case you're wondering what all that was:

"Accursed mortal with your pointless existence. May your limbs rot off, and your bowels devour themselves."

It's tradition to curse your enemy with failing health! Review! Any questions?

I Do What I Want

Chapter Notes

NOTE: The words in Italics that are not contained in "" are accidental thoughts, not intended for the other to hear.

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chpt 4

(I do What I want)

A small explosion filled the cave. Tony let out a yell, and he scrambled backwards blindly, wishing he had closed his eyes when the flash ignited. Terrified and confused, he kept himself pressed against the wall.

"L-lokes?" His voice caught as he started coughing. He blinked, trying to clear the brightness from his eyes while searching the cave for Loki.

Was I just attacked?

Loki's voice was close to his ear. "Stark, are you alright? Can you hear me?"

Tony noted the hint of concern in the god's voice and squinted at the shadowy figure close to him. He managed to grumble, "I'm in one piece... I think. What the fuck was that all about?"

As his vision became more clear, he saw Loki glance behind him at the wall of green flames. Loki's gesture tamed the fire back into a small crackling blaze. Turning and looking at Stark guiltily he spoke, "In my surprise I... may have lost control of my magic for a moment. "

His voice changed from guilty to gentle.

"You have my apologies. "

Tony choked in surprise at the apology as he sat up slowly, feeling light-headed. Hissing in pain, he closed his eyes against the lights and sounds of the cave. He must have bumped his head against the wall when he fell. Loki frowned and reached forward, gently touching the back of Tony's sore head. Tony jumped at his touch, wrenching his eyes open to blink at Loki. The god's eyes traveled over Stark's face as his expression softened into a look of concern.

Suddenly, a tingling sensation grew from the back of Tony's head. His eyes widened with fear as he struggled to get away from Loki's hand.

Loki tsked and put a hand on his chest to hold him still.

"Calm yourself and stop flailing about. "

Tendrils of magic snuck up Tony's neck to his face, finding small cuts and bruises to heal. Tony found himself staring into the red eyes and relaxing.

Oh god I think I'm blushing. I'm an adult, not some teenager with a crush. Plus, I'm supposed to not blush about anyone but Pepper. We're way too close and his expression is just so...

Wait-a-minute.

"Uh, Lokes?"

The god's focus shifted from healing as he looked Stark in the eye, raising an eyebrow.

Tony smiled worriedly. "Your hair's on fire. "

Loki's eyes remained clouded with confusion. "My hair..."

"Is on fire."

Loki's hands immediately flew to the top of his head, letting out a strangled shriek.

"NNNGYAAAH!?"

His expression grew more panicked as he patted out the flames. He ran his fingers through his hair long after it was extinguished, panting slightly.

Tony couldn't hold it in any longer. He burst out laughing.

"What was that ungraceful sound!?"

He doubled over with laughter, his head bumping against Loki's shoulder.

"Don't worry, that greasy mop you call hair hasn't crawled off your head yet. "

Loki's eyes narrowed into angry slits as he let out a low growl.

Tony giggled into the angry god's shoulder. "You care way too much about your hair, Fabio."

Loki opened his mouth to explain how badly fire could hurt him due to his heritage, before snapping it closed again. He rolled his eyes and pushed Tony's head off his shoulder to stand up. Losing his balance as he stood he stumbled back to the ground, he furiously spit out, "Fara til helvítis þér gagnslaus líkama!"

Tony burst out laughing again, leaving Loki looking hurt and angry. He was not completely healed, he thought, and it wasn't *funny* to lose control of your magic or your body. He crawled back over to what he thought of as his side of the cave. Tony, still giggling, followed him over.

Loki sat down before he noticing that Stark was right behind him. He made his tone as icy as possible. "And what, pray tell, are you doing over here? You have a wall of your own to lean on and I would like to get some rest so I may return you tomorrow."

Tony simply pouted and snuggled next to him, ignoring Loki's glare and obvious discomfort. His red eyes stayed on Stark, filled with questions and suspicions. He observed the human as he fell asleep, Stark's mouth falling open slightly and his head growing heavier on the god's shoulder. Loki watched as Tony's head slid down a little, into a deeper sleep. He sighed as he felt the familiar

tug of exhaustion, aided by the sounds of Stark's soft breathing.

*Who would have guessed, after everything that has happened, I am sleeping next to a mortal.
Next to The Man of Iron.
And he's **drooling** on me.
How far I have fallen.*

He closed his eyes and fell into a nightmare-plagued sleep.

Tony was dragged from his own nightmares by the sounds of muffled whimpering. Realizing his head was now on Loki's lap, he sat up carefully.

He looked at the god, still propped up against the wall, and realized the sounds were coming from him. Loki was breathing heavily, his breath coming out in whimpers and muttering. He leaned in closer to hear what the god was saying, then jumped away when the god suddenly screamed.

Whoa, okay time to wake him up.

He reached out and gently poked Loki's shoulder, afraid to move close to him again. When nothing happened, he tried jabbing the god's cheek. Loki twitched and whimpered, still trapped in his dreams.

Alright, drastic times call for something dangerous, or something.

Tony leaned in close to Loki's ear and started talking softly, but soon grew louder, "Loki, hey, Loki. Rock of Ages, Reindeer games... wake up... WAKE UP FROSTY!"

Tony jumped back quickly before Loki's eyes snapped open. His red eyes, wide with fear, stared forward at nothing. His breathing still heavy, he continued staring blankly until Tony shifted closer to him again.

Loki's eyes snapped to the figure beside him, flinching away from it before he could register who it was. As his eyes focused and he realized it was just Stark, he noticed the man gazing at him with a strange expression on his face. Loki couldn't place it. He found himself staring back into the mortal's brown eyes.

Oddly clear, brown eyes.

Shaking his head clear his thoughts, he ran his hands over his face slowly. As embarrassing as it was to be helped out of his nightmares by a bratty mortal, he was truly grateful to be relieved of them.

Tony's mind was bubbling over with questions. What was so terrible to make The God of Mischief and Lies scream? He bit his tongue, knowing better than to ask about it.

He, himself, had nightmares about the cave his alter ego was born in.

About the moment he saw his logo on a weapon aimed at him.

The very second he knew that it was him, Tony Stark, who killed thousands of innocent people with those same weapons.

Dreams that plagued him even as he grew past the greed and became a "Hero". He would never

talk about it, but he could understand Loki better now.

They were both haunted by their captors and by their actions.

He glanced up at Loki again, watching different expressions flash across his face.

He's an open book if you look closely enough. I'm surprised he is able to fool people so easily.

Tony felt a smile begin to grow. He suddenly stood up and stretched, his back making an unnatural amount of cracking sounds. He was surprised to hear a soft chuckle from the god.

"Now, that can not be a good sound, Stark," Loki said, looking up at the shorter man from the ground.

Tony sneered at him before wandering over to his suit case. Briefly inspecting it for any damage, he called over his shoulder, "Are we ready to go, Lokes? It's already been a day since we left Earth."

Loki frowned, unseen by Stark, and carefully stood.

He spoke slowly, "It has been a few days, I'm afraid. You were unconscious for two days and I was hardly conscious for the first night."

Tony turned and looked at him, not looking as surprised as Loki had expected. He sighed. "I figured as much. You just confirmed it. How long will it take to travel there? I don't want them writing me off for dead just because I'm missing for a few days."

Loki's frowned deepened as he kept eye contact with Stark. "I'm sorry, but time moves more differently than you know. What has been a short while for us could have been a few months on Earth. "

Tony's expression changed immediately into panicked anger. "You're fucking *kidding* me?! I've got people back there, and that would have been nice to know, Gonzo!"

Loki's look of guilt stopped Tony's rant in its tracks. It wasn't really his fault he hadn't told him, after all. There hadn't exactly been a quiet moment between the life stories, explosions, healing, and sleeping.

"What is a 'Gonzo'? Another useless Earth cultural reference?"

Tony jerked his head up, his thoughts interrupted. He blinked, laughing,

"Useless for now! I will be sitting you down to watch the Muppets as soon as we get back."

Loki rolled his eyes. "I hardly doubt that is the most important task to undertake when arriving. Especially since I will be seen as a hostile force, and you have been missing for months."

Tony made a face before activating his suit. He watched the god's face as the metal crawled over his body.

What does that look mean?

It looks almost... Appreciative.

Tony shivered a little as the last of his suit fit into place, leaving the face plate open.

This is not happening.

I'm going home to Earth where there's AC/DC and Pepper.

Yeah, but you're bringing him home with you .

Shut up.

Flipping the face plate down, he looked at Loki through the glowing eyes of the Iron Man again. "You ready?"

Loki smiled at the familiar metallic sound of his voice. "If you are, then we shall go. Come close and hold on to my arm tightly. If you let go, you will fall through the void forever. Trust me, it is not a pleasant thing. "

Tony cleared his throat to ask, "Uh, wouldn't it be better if I just... Hold on to you?"

Loki looked thoughtful for a moment, looking up and down at the metal suit. Tony suppressed another shiver.

At last the god spoke up, "That would be better for you, although I can imagine I will be rather heavily bruised in the end. "

Tony opened his arms wide. "Hug time, Lokes!"

Loki stared at him in disgust before stepping forward into his arms.

"You will never cease to be moronic, even in serious moments."

Tony snorted and wrapped his arms around Loki's thin frame. "*Especially* in serious moments. Don't you feel less scared?"

Tilting his head up to look into the glowing eyes, Loki sneered. "I do not get *scared*, Stark. Now stop your endless chatter before you bite your tongue off."

Tony let out another loud snort, the sound distorted through the suit. Loki suppressed a smile and started muttering quietly.

Tony opened his mouth to ask when all the hocus pocus was going to start when suddenly, it did.

He nearly let go, the sheer force almost ripping Loki out of his arms. For a single panicked moment he thought he had lost him, and he couldn't feel his own body. Then it was over, and he was on his back on the floor of his own penthouse.

He felt nauseous. It felt better to keep his eyes closed.

God, I actually want to get out of my suit. I feel so claustrophobic suddenly.

He disengaged the suit, enjoying the first breath of fresh, non-frozen, alien air.

Opening his eyes, he glanced down at the god's body that lay on top of him. He hadn't moved since they landed in Tony's living room. Tony sat up gingerly, shifting Loki's body to get a better look at it.

He looked worn down, his skin paler than Tony had ever seen it. Dark shadows lay under his eyes, as if someone had punched him. The gods eyes suddenly opened wide before glancing around. They slowly found their way to Tony's face, meeting his eye.

"I see you made it. Congratulations," he croaked.

Tony started to laugh, feeling ridiculous and loopy. Much to his surprise, the god did too.

They were both still laughing when Jarvis' voice interrupted them.

"Sir, I am ever so glad to see you have returned. You had been officially listed as missing until a month ago."

Tony looked up at the ceiling, chuckling.

"I'm happy to be back, Jarvis." Then Jarvis' words sunk in fully. "Wait, what happened a month ago?" he asked.

There was a pause,

"You were officially listed as dead, sir. "

Chapter End Notes

Loki: "Go to hell you useless body"

karma or Kamikaze

Chapter Notes

NOTE: The words in Italics that are not contained in "" are accidental thoughts, not intended for the other to hear.

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard.

Chpt 5

(Karma or Kamikaze)

Loki glanced around for the source of the disembodied voice for a while, avoiding looking anywhere that was near Stark. After a few minutes he gave in, finding nowhere else left to look.

Tony was sitting in front of Loki, staring at the window where the sunlight was coming in. After a few minutes he cleared his throat and weakly asked,
"Jarvis... How long ,exactly, have I been away?"

Jarvis spoke up immediately, replying "One year, five months, three days, twenty hours, and four minutes, sir."

Tony jumped up and started to pace around the room.

Loki felt himself flinching back from the waves of anger coming from him. Stark stopped suddenly and directed his rage at Loki. "You... YOU SAID A MONTH!?"

He stalked closer to Loki angrily, fists raised and clenched. Loki crawled backwards and curled up, expecting blows.

He couldn't understand it himself. There was no way that the travel took that long. He kept going through the possibilities, curled up with his arms over his head, before he noticed he was not being hit.

Tony stood stock still, looking at the weak, curled-up ball of a god.

He was that terrified that I was going to... hit him? Tony thought.

Tony knelt next to him, reaching out to calm the god. Loki flinched, bursting out,
"It truly did not know! It-it's impossible to have taken that long. I swear it!"

Tony frowned and quickly pulled Loki into his arms. He had no idea why he was freaking out this badly, but he needed to calm down. He felt a sudden sadness tighten his throat.

"Lokes... I'm not really blaming you. I'm sorry I got mad. I'm just a loud asshole. You should know that by now."

Loki shuddered in Tony's arms and visibly relaxed. A small voice came from somewhere around Tony's chest.

"My apologies for breaking down like this. I am not at my strongest now, neither physically nor mentally."

There was a long pause. Loki continued quietly, "The... The only reason I can imagine that time has changed so, was that the energy from the original portal was corrupted in some way. I fear that my choice of planet may have been a poor decision, considering the distance from both Earth and the Chitauri..."

He tapered off into a whisper, keeping his face pressed against Tony.

Tony felt a strange comfort being pressed against the god without his suit in between. He had rested his head on him before, but to have Loki relying on him for comfort felt...

Amazing.

Alright, enough of this half assed emotional thing.

Tony forced a smirk, and asked, "Are you crying, my blue friend?"

Loki's head suddenly whipped up, nearly smashing into Tony's chin. His glare could have melted the icecaps, or possibly all of Jötunheim. With a voice so cold that it made Tony visibly shiver, he spoke.

"Firstly, Stark, I do not cry. Ever. Secondly, Stark, as weak as I am, I can still kill you in a second. And lastly, Stark—"

"Sir?" Jarvis interrupted.

Loki's glare changed its focus to the ceiling and Tony was glad for the moment of relief.

"What is it, Jarvis?" he asked. "I'm kind of busy being threatened here after trying to comfort a god."

Loki's glare returned to him, but there was a slight hint of a smile on his lips.

"I thought I should warn you that SHIELD agents are on their way to the house. I am unsure if you should be seen embracing the enemy, sir."

"He is *not* the enemy!" Tony snapped at the AI. "Also, why the fuck are they coming to my house if I'm dead?"

Jarvis responded with a slightly sarcastic tone. "They have been keeping an eye out for Loki's magic, *sir*. They must have picked up on him as you came in."

Tony swore nearly every swear word he could conjure up as he stood. He started pacing again before a giggle interrupted him. He twisted around in shock, seeing Loki sitting in the middle of his carpet, laughing.

Raising an eyebrow and stepping closer, Tony asked, "Have you finally snapped, Lokes? 'Cuz this situation is in no way funny."

Loki continued to chuckle at Tony while gracefully standing up.

"It's not amusing, no," he replied. "But your swearing was."

Suddenly, the god's eyes were back to green while his face slowly filled in with flesh color.

*If that's what you can call skin color.
He looks worse now than he did when he was blue.
At least bruises on blue look like more blue.*

Tony frowned, walking up to the taller man and studying his face.

"You look like shit. Why didn't you say how bad it was?"

Loki's sallow skin was bruised nearly everywhere. His hair lay damp and limp against his head, except where it had been ruffled up from his earlier panic attack. Although the god worked to maintain his usual perfect posture, he was listing a bit to one side.

Loki tilted his head, saying nothing.

Tony mentally flailed,
I did not find that cute. No, I really didn't.

Loki spoke up. "I think the more important issue is what to do about your SHIELD coming here? Should I even bother hiding, since they seem to be aware of my presence?"

Loki observed the shorter man's face as he thought it through. It was an interesting process to watch, considering the mortal was actually quite smart. He looked a lot better than on the previous days, and his skin was a healthier color. His hair, usually ridiculous, was sticking up in strange clumps. Loki found himself tempted to run his fingers through it, to pat it back down.

Tony focus snapped back to Loki, distracting the god from his thoughts.

"We are going to have to explain as best as we can," Tony said. "Like we originally planned, just a lot sooner." He grimaced and shrugged a bit.

Loki frowned in reply. "This isn't going to work, as our original plan was based on the fact that we were missing only a month or so. I do not-

"SHIELD has arrived, sir," Jarvis chimed in.

Immediately after Jarvis' announcement came the distinct sounds of soldiers moving through the halls around them. Tony stepped in front of Loki and backed him against the wall. The room filled quickly with soldiers, each finding a point in the room to make their stand, their guns raised and ready.

The silence after the movement ceased was heavy, and Tony felt sweat break out on his skin.

Suddenly, Loki's voice spoke softly in his head.

"Stark, you should provide proof that you aren't under my control. That is sure to be the first question on everyone's mind."

Tony thought back, *"I know, I have a few tricks up my sleeve. Just let me do the talking first and don't... Move. Okay?"*

Tony could sense Loki's sneer in his head, as well as the huff of air he let out against the back of his neck.

He was about to say something to the heavily armed agents before a loud voice filled the room.

"Well, Loki, I would say this is an unexpected surprise, but it isn't."

Directory Fury stalked into the room, brushing past soldiers to reach the middle of the carpet. One eyebrow went up at the sight of Tony.

"Stark, I'm glad to see you are alive. Care to explain why you're hiding a war criminal behind your back?" he asked. "Or how about where the *fuck* you two have been for the past year and a half?"

Tony automatically snapped back. "Gee. I don't know, Patches, where should I start? So many questions can make a girl conflicted."

Tony nearly squeaked when Loki jabbed him in the back.

His mind filled with the gods voice.

"Cut that nonsense out, Stark. I don't particularly feel like dying by your side today."

Tony smiled at the wording and looked Fury in the eye. His tone serious, he began, "Loki is not a war criminal, more or less. His actions in New York were not by his choosing, seeing as he was under control of uh... "

Loki interrupted quietly,

"Thanos."

Tony glanced behind him at the god and thought,

"I was getting there! Way to go, let's make them think you're coaching what I say some more. Shut up!"

Loki made a face somewhere in between "don't you dare tell me to shut up" and "I'm sorry, okay?"

Tony turned back to Fury, noting the look of suspicion in his eye. "Look, I guess I should start with proving that I'm me and not under any kind of control, yeah? "

Fury nodded and gestured for him to go on.

Tony swallowed. "Back when Loki and I fought in Stark Tower, he tried to use his magic glowy stick of glory to control me. It didn't work, and I cracked some witty joke about performance that —"

Fury interrupted in a menacing tone, "Stark."

Tony cleared his throat and grinned. Pissing off Fury was as easy as ever. "I guess, no one was there so I can't say 'ask them!' But I'm sure Jarvis has the video feed somewhere."

The AI joined in, "I do ,sir, and SHIELD has already viewed that file."

Tony frowned at the ceiling and then looked back at Fury. "So you already know I can't be controlled."

There was the sound of more footsteps and Fury was joined by Clint and Natasha. Tony felt a mix of emotions upon seeing them.

Mostly fear at the moment.

Tony suddenly had an idea. "Oh! I know! How about I share something only Tony Stark from before the New York incident could know?"

His grin widened as Fury nodded again, looking interested.

Tony, speaking towards the ceiling, began.

"Jarvis, pull up folder 'Summer Hot Tubs' for me, please."

There was a pause before Jarvis asked, "Shall I put it up on the large screen, sir?"

Tony chuckled. "Yes. Now open the secondary folder titled 'Budapest'. You know the password."

Jarvis, sounding almost guilty, responded, "In this instance it would be preferable if you showed that you knew the password, sir."

Tony glared up at the ceiling. Where was Jarvis getting this personality from?

Rolling his eyes, he replied, "Take me out to the ball game, with the number three for the 'e's'."

Clint snorted from beside Natasha, earning him an elbow to the gut.

Loki observed their behavior and leaned close to Tony's ear, whispering, "Those two have become more intimate since we last saw them."

Tony barely suppressed a shiver from the god's breath in his ear.

*Please, god, never do that again...
At least not in public.*

Loki overheard the thought.

"Oh, so I have permission to do that in private?"

Tony flipped his head around, blushing a little.

"No! Just... Don't. What happened to being quiet? Do I have to treat you like a child and silence you myself?"

Loki let out a small huff of laughter. Tony turned his head back to the staring crowd, smiling. The little interaction had clearly not gone unnoticed.

Oh sweet fuck, please tell me they haven't noticed we can talk to each other in our heads?

His lips tightened together. "Jarvis... Find folder labeled 'Legolas Drops Trou'."

Clint's eyes widened as he stepped forward and shouted, "**NO!**"

Natasha actually laughed, and Fury looked curious. Tony grinned with pride.

"What's wrong Agent ? I need to prove I'm actually The Tony Stark."

Clint glared at him. "I'm pretty sure only the real Tony would pull a stunt like this," he said. "Also, how in the hell do you have a visual of that?"

Tony tsked, shaking a finger at the archer. "Silly Legolas, there are cameras everywhere. When I was given everyone's information, I went on a little info gathering spree of my own. I just had to save some files from Budapest on you."

Tony glanced over at Natasha, his smirk falling. His face grew sober. "Agent Romanoff, what I found for you I left alone... except to destroy some of the files."

Nat gave Tony a sad little smile and nodded a thanks. Tony returned his gaze onto Fury, raising an eyebrow.

Fury heaved a sigh and crossed his arms. "Yes, Stark, you are the *lovable* asshole we all know. Now would you care to explain why Thor's insane brother is somehow not a criminal?"

Tony looked around the room. "Hey, where is the big guy? I thought for sure he would be front

and center, bawling that his brother has returned to him."

Clint let out another snort and was silenced by a glare from Fury. Turning back to face Stark, he replied, "We didn't call him. He has been jumping at every blip on the map for a year now. We wanted to be sure this time, before we let him know Loki had returned. "

Loki cleared his throat and peeked out from behind Tony's head. Smiling weakly, he said, "You should know, he is already aware that I am here. He would have felt my magic immediately. " Loki paused and tilted his head, listening. Everyone stopped and listened as well, finally noticing the sounds of rolling thunder.

Fury looked up at the ceiling and muttered, "Oh shit."

There was an impressive crash as the god of thunder threw himself through the ceiling and into the room. Rubble flew, sending the agents scattering to avoid being hit. Before anyone else could say anything, a voice bellowed out,

"**LOOOOKKKIII!** Why have you returned now!?"

The dust slowly settled enough for Fury and his agents to see Thor in the middle of the room, surrounded by parts of the former ceiling.

In front of him stood Stark, in the exact same position but inside some sort of greenish shield. Loki held a hand up, mumbling something before the shield fell with a soft pop.

Loki frowned gravely at his brother from behind Tony. "Thor, you could have killed people. I thought you had overcome that impulsive side of yours."

Thor let out a bitter laugh. "Warning me that I could have killed humans, brother? This is an amusing irony."

"Regardless of the situation, Thor, I am *not* your brother," Loki snarled back. "If you would gather your wits for a moment, I shall explain the events of New York as best I can. "

Fury gestured to the men in the room with guns, without taking his eyes off of Tony and Loki. Many of the soldiers left, and the remaining lowered their weapons. "Stark, you can move now," Fury said. "I would like to hear this face to face. "

Tony's lips formed a thin line, he looked Fury in the eye before stepping to the side a little. More than half his body was still in front of the Loki. Clint and Natasha raised their eyebrows, but no one commented on it.

Loki cleared his throat and glanced at Thor before he began. "I suppose I should start somewhere near the beginning. Back when I originally attacked a town somewhere... south of here." Loki went on, again explaining how he came to fall, how he met Thanos, and what emotions lead him into the trap set by the king.

"I was *fooled*. He successfully fooled the trickster, " Loki said bitterly. "I had felt betrayed by the man I believed my father and I found myself searching for understanding in anyone. I thought... I thought he cared. By the time I realized his words were binding me, I was already under his spell. Thanos held me directly in his thrall. I believe I lacked the blue eyes of those under the power of the staff. I..."

Loki stuttered to a halt, his eyes focused on the floor. A sheen of sweat had formed during his talk and his hands were clenched in fists. Tony turned and thought to him,

"Lokes? You're looking really bad. What's wrong?"

Loki glanced at Tony with relief, thinking in reply,

"I am completely out of energy, Stark. I'm having trouble holding onto my form."

Thor's voice interrupted their thoughts. "Broth...Loki, you look unwell. What ails you?" Thor stepped closer, reaching out in a gesture of affection. Loki hissed and stepped back behind Tony a little more. Thor's face fell, clearly hurt by Loki's reaction.

Loki simply muttered, "You know what would happen if I touched you just now. I am... not at my strongest, Thor."

Fury's eyebrow went up, along with nearly everyone else's. Thor looked confused for a moment before it dawned on him. "Oh! I apologize, I didn't realize you were this unwell, Bro...Loki." Tony glanced at Loki and back at Thor.

Tony thought,

So he did know his brother was a smurf.

So what happens when a smurf touches an Asgardian?

Thor spoke up again, this time at director Fury. "I would like to suggest my brother rest here with the son of Stark before he continue with his tale."

Fury glowered at Thor and then turned to assess Loki. Even he could see the god looked like hell. He did just perform magic that protected Stark, the director thought. Then again, he was right behind the man and was probably protecting himself.

"So it would be just you and Stark looking after him?" he asked. "How do we know he isn't going to wake up and start killing everyone again? "

Loki looked thoughtful for a moment and coughed, gaining everyone's attention.

"I believe I can grant an... offering of good faith. A peace offering, if you will."

"What could you possibly have to offer? You're not exactly carrying anything," Fury inquired, clearly curious.

"I would offer you the Casket of Ancient Winters, from the Frost Giants. Currently, only I am able to wield it, so it would remain inactive in your care. However, I'm sure your scientists would enjoy examining it."

Thor's mouth had dropped open at the mention of the casket. "You still are in possession of that, brother!?" he shouted.

Loki rolled his eyes and sneered at his brother. "Yes. It has never left my possession since I fell."

Tony spoke up quickly. "You have a casket on you? Right now?" Tony circled the god. "Where, in a back pocket?"

Fury interrupted the debate. "Stark, if you're done looking at Loki's ass, can we get a move on?"

Tony stopped and stared at the director. Clint had a hand over his mouth, his shoulders shaking

with silent laughter. "Oooh man," Stark said, with a sly smile. "I couldn't have made you say that if I tried. JARVIS! Save that audio clip, loop it and save it as my ring tone. Then call me."

"Immediately, sir," Jarvis replied. The room suddenly filled with Fury's voice repeating itself.
" *Loki's ass. Loki's ass. Loki's ass...*"

"ENOUGH," Fury growled. "You," he said, pointing at Thor, "Keep an eye on both of them. If Stark starts acting less of an ass-hat and more of a weirdo, zap him. You know what to do with your brother." Fury focused his glare at Loki. "And you, hand over that casket. I'll keep it as a promise of good behavior. Since you're the only one who can wield it, apparently. "

Loki's face tensed into a mask of full concentration. His effort to perform the magic was nearly tangible. He twisted his wrists, and then, from between his hands, a gently glowing, floating casket appeared. He held it forward between his hands, offering it to the director.

Fury frowned at that display. "I'm not just gonna' take some floating magical thing. Hand it over normally."

Loki grimaced, glancing first at Thor and then Tony. "I.. Can't touch it, currently," he said. "I'm afraid it would affect me poorly. "

"If it effects you 'poorly', there's no way I'm touching that shit."

Loki bit his lip, trying to hold his concentration. Tony suddenly stepped forward, reaching out for the casket. His eyes met Loki's as he asked silently,

"*Is it safe for me?*"

Loki smiled warmly in answer.

"*Yes. And thank you.*"

Fury followed their movements, watching as some sort of silent exchange was made. This wasn't the first time they had shared something quietly. Something fishy was going on between those two, he thought.

Tony interrupted the director's thoughts by handing the casket over a bit roughly. It was heavier than either of them had expected.

"Watch them," Fury commanded Thor. Casting one more all-encompassing glare around the room, Fury stalked out with his new prize. Natasha moved to follow him, but Clint lagged behind. He shuffled his feet a little and glanced at Tony.

"Hey man, I'm just glad you're alive," Clint said. He smiled sheepishly. "I don't know about this whole Loki thing, but you're alive, and that's what counts." Tony grinned at him and waved as the archer left, followed by the rest of the SHIELD agents.

The front door clicked shut.

Loki was blue before he hit the floor, unconscious.

Until Death Do Us Part

Chapter Notes

NOTE: The words in Italics that are not contained in "" are accidental thoughts, not intended for the other to hear.

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard.

Disclaimer:

I do not own any rights to these characters. Story is my own.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapt 6

(Until Death Do Us Part)

After Tony's unsuccessful attempts to drag Loki, Thor lifted the god's frail body over one shoulder.

Tony sulkily directed Thor to his own bedroom, side-stepping the new pile of ceiling. The larger god carefully dropped his brother into the bed, gently touching his pale cheek with the back of a hand. He gingerly sat down beside Loki, his eyes not moving from his sleeping brother.

"Son of Stark, would you tell me where the two of you have been, and why my brother is in such a condition?" Thor's tone was calm, but Tony could sense the anger and concern underneath it.

Tony gestured for Thor to follow him back out into the ruined living room. He threw himself on a couch, coughing either from dust that had collected for over a year, or from Thor's recent ceiling remodeling. Closing his eyes for a moment, he enjoyed the glorious feeling of cushions underneath him.

He felt Thor sit nearby. The floor shook.

"Man of Iron, I know you are exhausted, but I desire to know more," Thor said.

Tony sighed and sat up, looking Thor over with a critical eye. The god looked nearly as beat as Loki, his eyes shadowed with the same dark crescents.

"You were out looking for your brother every day, huh?" Tony gave him a sad smile. "I'm sorry for acting so nonchalant about this but... that's how I handle things. Plus, it's only been a few days for us. It's a little hard to wrap my head around the fact that it's been a year for all of you."

Tony paused when he realized that the two of them didn't know a thing about one another. Thor didn't understand Tony's need for sarcasm or light-hearted remarks.

He ran a hand down his face and grumbling, "Look, Blondie, your brother saved my ass by bringing me to his Smurf planet. As you heard, his brain got Hulked enough for him to come back to what's left of his senses. Apparently when we arrived I was out of it for a few days. After I woke

up I saw that your brother had taken the brunt of the damage in the fall. He was in bad shape, I mean really bad... I mean like limbs going in the wrong direction and shit." Tony faltered as he saw Thor's eyebrows furrow in pain.

He instinctively reached out and patted the god's shoulder. "I know. It was scary to me too, regardless that he was an enemy to me, like, a day before. "

Thor's face lit up as he bellowed happily, "It is nice that you have grown to care for my dear brother! I had hopes that someone other than I would be there for him!"

Tony waved his arms frantically and put a finger to his lips. "Shhh, geez, use your inside voice!"

Thor made a noise rather like a horse and Tony continued on, a little quieter.

"It took a while, you know, for him to heal. Then we were here and you came smashing through my roof before I could even enjoy the *luxury* of having one again." Tony glared at the god.

Thor looked down at his hands sheepishly. "You have my deepest apologies, Son of Stark, I did not know anyone other than Loki was here. I only sensed his magic and came as fast as Mjölhnir could carry me." He rubbed the palms of his hands together before looking back at Stark seriously.

"You speak of a few days spent there and a short journey," he said. "I know of the time distortion between our realms, but a year is unexplainable."

"That is something your brother may be able to explain better than me. I already freaked out at him about it and he sort of... freaked out back." Tony closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Apparently the energy he used from the portal was corrupted or some shit like that. I honestly don't even think he knows. I wouldn't bring it up right away; he was almost crying about it." Tony smiled a little at the memory of the god pressed into him.

He felt the tension in his body release suddenly, and his eyes refused to reopen.

How is it, just thinking about being close to Loki was this relaxing?

Something is wrong about that.

That's like feeling relaxed with a porcupine.

Tony giggled at his own thoughts as he dozed off, muttering, "Loki is one quill short of a porcupine... his... hair."

Thor raised an eyebrow as the mortal beside him fell asleep. He felt conflicted about Stark's closeness to his brother. On the one hand, Stark might be one of the few who could understand Loki. From what Thor read in Stark's file, the mortal had similar issues with his own father, which lead to similar self destructive behavior. Although he doubted that Stark had tried to throw himself off of something like the Bifrost.

On the other hand, there was something off about the two of them. It was as though they were in their own realm where no one else existed. Thor worried that this was a connection of necessity, that their closeness would dissipate once the need for one another was gone.

The god sighed deeply and left Tony on the couch to watch his brother sleep.

Loki was wandering the halls of Jötunheim.

He had seen so little of it in his previous visits, he was unsure of where he was exactly. He was sickened at the thought that this would have been his palace, his kingdom.

There was no one here for him, no Frost Giants left to rule, no family left to call his own.

He paused at the door of a room filled with scrolls, staring inside. He felt cold, something he had never felt before.

I am never cold, I am a monster of ice.

This must be what dying feels like.

All at once, he was sitting on the floor, a scroll already in his hand. As he squinted at the writing, the words wavered in front of his eyes. The language was meaningless nonsense to him.

Impossible. I know more languages of the Nine Realms than Odin did. I sure as helvíti knew how to read the language of the Frost Giants.

He tried another scroll before feeling a trickle of fear sneak up his spine.

Where is Stark?

Loki jumped up and ran from the room, the floor crackling under him. Running through halls and rooms, he jumped over fallen columns, slid over ice. The halls refused to end, the light of the world seemed to dim the longer he ran. A whimper escaped his lips as the darkness pulled in around him, pressing against his body. He felt his breath catch in his throat at the rustle of wings in the darkness.

I know this feeling, I know this loneliness.

The void whispers in his ear,

"Welcome back."

Loki screams.

Both Thor and Tony jerked awake at the same time to the sound of harsh, unending screams. Tony flailed his body upright, immediately falling off the couch. Cursing, he scrambled to the bedroom, slamming open the door while groggily shouting, "Lokes?!"

Thor jumped and spun around from his position by the bed, his hammer ready in his hand. His eyes met Stark's briefly before returning to his screaming brother. Tony rushed over to join Thor. "He's screaming in his sleep again?" he asked nervously.

This is worse than last time.

He can't stop.

Brushing past Thor, Tony knelt on the bed to lean close to the god's ear. Thor reached to stop Tony from moving nearer to his brother. Stark shrugged the god's hand off his shoulder.

Tony placed a hand on Loki's chest to calm him and whispered in his ear, "Lokes, you're fine. You're not alone. You're just dreaming."

Loki's scream tapered into a whimper before it started once again.

Tony grimaced at the sound, closing his eyes.

Time to try something different.

He concentrated, forcing his thoughts into the chaos of Loki's brain.

*"Loki, you need to wake up. Lokes, it's Tony.
Lokes, your brother... uh. Thor is here."*

Loki's voice was growing weak and raw from his screaming.

Tony tried again,

*"Wake up before we strip you naked and draw penises on your body. GOD DAMMIT LOKI, WAKE
THE FUCK UP!"*

Tony felt a push on his chest and suddenly he was in the air. He had time to think,

Huh.

That worked.

before his body smashed against the wall. There was an inhuman snarl from somewhere in the bed and a soft grunt in response. Tony groaned, tilting his head to see Thor struggling to hold Loki down on the bed. He stood up shakily and snuck closer to the bed, trying to find Loki's eyes. He frowned. There was too much going on.

"Loki..."

The god froze in his struggling, nearly sending Thor flying from the lack of resistance. His eyes made their way to Stark's from under one of Thor's arms. The clouds of confusion and fear cleared from his eyes. Loki managed to whisper,

"Oh, it was you."

There was pause before Loki let out a huff of laughter and rolled his eyes.

"Of course it was you," he croaked. "No one else would threaten me as you do."

Tony glanced at Thor's confused face and smiled, reaching down to help him up. They both stood and looked down at Loki. His bruises had healed completely, only leaving the constant shadows under his eyes. He still looked sickly; a sheen of sweat covered his skin. His body was shaking badly. He noticed them watching him and tucked his quivering hands into his lap.

Loki's body suddenly shook hard with dry, raw coughs. Hands reaching up, he clutched his throat as a pained expression flashed across his face. Thor leant forward immediately to comfort him but was pushed away. Loki's eyes narrowed in anger at the pity on their faces as a few sparks of green drifted from his hand into his neck. Quickly, his face changed to a mask of indifference, no longer showing the pain or anger.

There was a gentle sigh before Loki appeared standing in front of them, fully dressed in new clothes. He had forgone his usual armor and leather for some sort of dull green tunic. Tony noted that he kept some leather for his pants.

His rather tight-fitting pants.

Loki smirked, watching Tony's eyes linger on his lower body. He found the mortal's fascination with his body, well...

Fascinating.

Thor, oblivious to anything passing between the two, suddenly obscured Tony's view by hugging his brother.

Loki's face went from surprise to distaste quickly, catching Stark's sarcastic "cutie" expression over

his brother's shoulder.

The god rolled his eyes dramatically and thought,

" As much hatred as I feel towards him, his puppy dog eyes are far worse a torture than this. "

Tony snorted out loud, covering his mouth too late. Thor turned and looked at him.

"What is amusing, Son of Stark?" he asked. He looked between Loki and Tony and frowned. "Was he making a fool of me from behind my back?"

Loki smiled, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "You know I would *never* do that to you, Thor. I enjoy our loving bonding moments most of all in this cold journey we call life. "

Tony narrowed his eyes; his lips held a shadow of a smile. He threw a thought at Loki,

" Cut him some slack. He's been looking for you for a year, and before that you were supposed to be dead and all. "

Loki arched an eyebrow at Tony, crossing his arms and tucking away his still shaking hands. They stared at each other for a moment before Thor cleared his throat. "Why do we not all join in breakfast! I am sure the Man of Iron still has some food items in his house," he said.

Tony stared at the god of thunder with a look of mild amusement. "What do you assume I have? I didn't even know what I had in my house when I actually spent time here."

Loki snickered, a low purring sound. "Undoubtably, copious amounts of alcohol and little else. "

Tony crossed his arms and looks thoughtful for a moment. "You know," he said. "You're right. That's *exactly* what I had. "

Thor was visibly crushed at this. His shoulders sagging, he managed to mutter, "Man of Iron has not even a Pop-tart? I was told that every human had Pop-tarts within their homes."

Something pure and innocent died in his eyes. His expression was that of a child, told that Santa was not real. Tony had to turn away, biting his lip to keep from laughing.

The god of thunder was in my bedroom. Near tears.

Over Pop-tarts.

Tony felt his stomach clench and grumble at the thought of food. Although he did not consider Pop-tarts suitable for human consumption, something else might be good. His mind lost in the thoughts of food, he strode out of the room without bothering to respond to Thor. The two gods glanced at one another before following him past the rubble in the living room and into the kitchen.

Tony stuck his head in the fridge and shouted, "JARVIS! Order something for us. Order pizza, order burgers, order a buffet. "

Loki slid delicately on to a bar stool and rested his chin on his hands. Thor followed suit, the stool making a slight crunching sound under his weight. Tony gave the larger god a threatening look as he shut the fridge.

Jarvis spoke, "I have placed an order for pizza, I'm afraid I had to use your personal account in

Germany seeing as your usual funds are frozen due to your alleged death. My apologies, sir. "

Tony glanced at the ceiling and scowled. "So I haven't been making any money while I was off being *not* dead with Gonzo here? "

While Tony continued to grumble into his fridge, Thor leaned close to Loki and muttered, "Who is 'Gonzo'? Was someone else with you?"

Loki as about to respond when Jarvis interrupted him, "You have ,sir, but no withdrawals are allowed on your main accounts. The only accounts available for use are your secret personal savings and the ones coupled with your company. The accounts associated with Stark Industries have been used for the usual donations and event funding. You will find that Mrs. Smith has taken good care of everything while you were away, sir. "

Tony's eyebrows furrowed, his mind filed though a long list of names. He gave up and asked Jarvis, "Who in the hell is Mrs. Smith and why does she have anything to do with my accounts?"

There was a long pause in which Tony began to tap his foot.

"Mrs. Smith would be Ms. Potts, sir." Jarvis responded. "She was married last month to a Jonas Smith."

Loki flinched back from the counter when Tony smashed his fist into it. He was still overly sensitive after all his recent trauma. It was a struggle to keep his hands from shaking again. Thor looked down at the counter, his face a veil of guilt and sadness. At last, Loki raised his eyes to find Stark staring directly at him. Tony's brown eyes were dark with anger. He swallowed the irrational desire to run away and kept his face calm, a small frown remaining on his lips.

The mortal blames me.

Of course he would, I am to blame for everything.

My weakness drew his planet into a war, and my foolish struggle to save him only caused him more grief.

I am always the one to destroying things for others.

His fingers clenched the edge of the countertop, his knuckles going white from the strain. Loki waited for Stark to explode at him, to scream and lash out, to beat him for what Loki had done to him. He waited, still gazing into those deep brown eyes, for the hatred to permanently settle in the mortal's heart.

Stark tore his eyes away from the god's across from him and looked at the top of Thor's bent head.

His voice was a low hiss. "*Thor.*"

The mighty warrior flinched at the tone of his friend's voice. Refusing to look at Tony, he continued to stare at the countertop like a terrified child.

Loki leant forward a little and touched his brother's shoulder in the first affectionate gesture he had offered him in years. He gently pushed a thought into the thunderer's head,

"Thor, you must look him in the eye. He will forgive you, but only if you speak honestly."

Thor's eyes widened and he quickly glanced at Loki. He hadn't heard his brother's voice in his mind since they were children, something that had happened less and less and they grew older. He had thought their mind link broken after the numerous times he had unsuccessfully tried to connect to his brother over the years. Thor struggled to push a thought back to his brother and found he couldn't. Loki flicked his eyes to Tony and frowned meaningfully at Thor.

Thor turned his head at last and looked solemnly at the mortal. His voice was low and apologetic. "Tony, I fear I was too caught up in my brother's return, I failed to tell such an important thing," he said. "You have my deepest apologies for not telling you. I honestly did not know of her engagement until a week before the marriage ceremony. Even then, none of the Avengers were invited. She had said to us that she felt it would be wrong to invite us...if you were not there."

Thor's head bent down again, his eyes brimmed with tears. He spoke again more softly, "We had truly thought you were dead, Son of Stark."

Tony exploded,

"STOP with the 'Son of Stark'! I have a name of my own! I do not need to be reminded that I was once the son of the miserable **STARK**!"

Thor flinched back but nodded silently in agreement. A painful silence filled the kitchen as everyone fell into their own thoughts.

It was a long time before Loki spoke up gently. "Tony?"

Tony whipped his head up, staring at the dark-haired god with his mouth open. He had never heard Loki use his first name, it had always been 'Stark' or 'Iron Man'.

Or 'Mortal'.

His anger quickly drained from him, replaced by a bizarre need to hear Loki's voice speak his name again. He closed his mouth and opened it again.

I can't just ask him to say it again.

How fucking weird would that be?

Tony closed his mouth once more with a snap and swallowed nervously. Loki continued to look at him, expecting a response.

The god tried again again. "Tony, perhaps you should let everyone know you are not dead?"

Tony had a small smile on his lips, still staring at Loki, deaf to all words other than his name on the god's lips.

He HAD said it again.

Loki's eyebrows drew together in confusion at Stark's reaction and interrupted Tony's thoughts with his own.

"Anthony, then? I do not wish to bother you by reminding you of someone you hate. I do not enjoy using 'Tony' as it goes against what I was taught as courteous. As it is, I would rather there be one less excuse for you to hate me."

Tony's brain caught up fast and he burst out laughing, startling Thor off his stool and made Loki to

jump. After a few moments of catching his breath, he managed to respond. "I don't hate you, Lokes," he said. "And I would prefer Tony, but you can choose."

Loki clenched the countertop again, looking down at his knuckles and thinking,

Liar.

He mumbled out loud, "Anthony will suffice, then."

"Sir." Jarvis spoke up, "The pizza has arrived and I would suggest Thor answer the door seeing as he is legally considered alive."

Thor nodded and eagerly rushed off to take the pizza from a very confused delivery man. He returned to see Loki and Tony looking at one another strangely. He watched as Tony's face went through several expressions in quick succession. Thor turned and looked thoughtfully at his brother, noticing an eyebrow rise here and a small smirk there.

Thor sat back on his stool before placing the pizza box down and distracting the two from their quiet moment. After a short search for plates, the kitchen filled with the sounds of chewing.

As Thor finished his third piece he turned to Loki and asked, "Brother, do you and St—Tony have a mind link?"

Chapter End Notes

Slowly going through and editing. My apologies.

Thank you for all the wonderful reviews so far!

The up to date chapters are up to 19 now. So no worries about lack of content. :)

When He's Good, He's Very Very Good

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not in anyway own these characters. All rights belong to Marvel etc.

NOTE: The words in Italics that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chpt 7

(When he's good, he's very very good)

Loki sputtered, ungracefully sending bits of pizza onto the counter. Tony nearly choked on a string of cheese and coughed a little longer than necessary. Thor had a look of triumph at their responses to his question, clearly satisfied with their spit-takes as an answer.

Tony found himself glaring at the blond god before bluntly saying, "Yes, if that's what this is called, then yes we do."

Tony glanced over at Loki and his heart stopped. The pale god's cheeks were flushed a bright red, his eyes glancing away from both of them.

That is by far, the cutest thing I have ever seen.

I feel no shame in thinking that.

Thor chuckled affectionately and pat his brother's shoulder. There was obviously more to this "Mind Link" than Loki let on. Tony's eyebrows drew together, trying to remember if either of the gods had mentioned anything about it.

Thor finished his laughter, smiling warmly at his younger brother.

"Oh Loki, my dear brother," he said fondly. "I know you are probably displeased by what this means. Fear not! For I have found love with a mort-"

Thor's words were cut off with a swift kick to the head from a spindly leg of Loki. Thor fell to the floor and his mouth opened in surprise. He stared up at his brother for a few moments before starting to laugh harder.

Loki snarled and glanced over at Tony, daring him to laugh. His cheeks were still flushed but his eyes were a dangerous, deep, green. Tony put his hands up in surrender, saying, "Hey, leave me out of it. I have no fucking clue what's going on anyway. Clearly this is a god thing."

Thor spoke between shuttering gasps of laughter, "Tony! To be able to speak to my brother so easily with a Mind Link holds incredible meaning. In Asgard, it is taken as a sign of true love, your fated one!"

Thor beamed up at the two of them as Loki's eyes narrowed into slits of hatred. His voice shrouded with ice, Loki responded, "That's all very well and fine for a *true* Asgardian. We all know I am not one, so this foolish belief does not even remotely apply. Monsters have no love, much less a fated one. "

Tony felt like he had been kicked in the chest at the god's words. His hand flew up to the arc reactor in his chest, attempting to find the solution to this sudden pain. Loki's attention was drawn to Stark by the sudden movement. The mortal looked pale, his face showing pain and confusion.

Concerned, Loki reached out and touched his arm gently. "Anthony, are you hurt?"

Tony glanced at him, his eyes flicking between the two green ones in front of him. All the signs of self-hatred and disgust were gone, replaced with concern. Tony felt the ache ease, his hand still covering the glow from his chest.

Plucking up some courage, he set his jaw and responded, "Lokes, you're not a monster. Saying you're a monster because you are of a different race is like saying an *apple* is one, because it's not a banana. If you say that, then all of us are monsters."

Tony felt like he was rambling, trying to keep his tone light. "I mean, hell, *I've* probably killed more people in my short little life time than you have in your decades. If anyone's a monster, a freak, it would be me."

He smiled bitterly and tapped the metal piece in his chest to prove his point.

Loki's eyes widened, his eyebrows knit together in wave of confusing grief. He felt ill hearing the mortal speak of himself this way. He frowned deeply.

"You do not understand, Anthony. I have grown up on the stories of monsters. I was taught to fear the very being that I am. I find myself the monster I feared as a child..." he faltered.

"Since when do you do what you're told, Loki?" Tony asked. "Don't believe something because someone told it to you. Isn't this the very basis of your existence? To be a stubborn, slightly bag-of-cats crazy..."

Loki gave him a warning look. Tony ignored it, continuing, "...but graceful, and unique God of Lies?"

Loki felt something inside him crumble and fall. It was as though his entire existence had been proven to be a lie.

Was I ever doing what I wanted...

Or did I always follow behind others.

He remembered always believing the stories Thor told him, until the day he heard him speak to his friends about Loki's "*adorable*" ignorance. It had become a game for Thor and his friends after that. Fool the God of Lies, because he's just a gullible child.

Loki's face grew dark at the memories of humiliation.

I played along, did I not. I pretended I believed them even though I knew of their game.

I did what they wanted to me to do from the very start.

Have I ever been allowed...no

Have I ever simply done what I wanted?

The painful betrayals lay deeply imbedded in him, quietly rotting like the soft flesh of a fruit. He knew not which deceptions or betrayals tormented him most: his own self-inflicted pain, his own lies... or those of the ones around him.

His face softened and he turned, walking out of the kitchen and into the living room, leaving the other two to stare after him in confusion. His thoughts continued on as he fidgeted with the sleeves of his tunic.

Anthony had said he, Loki, was not a monster.

His argument was indeed a valid point, we are all monsters.

Although, it is not just my blue skin that makes me a monstrosity.

Entering the living room, he glanced around at the scatter of drywall and concrete. He flicked a finger here and there, sending pieces of ceiling back into their places.

His thoughts dragged on.

*The mortal has said he was a **monster** , that he had killed more people than a god.*

Loki frowned, again feeling a fluttering pinch in his chest. The expression on Tony's face haunted the god as he finished fixing the ceiling.

Anthony was no monster.

He has taken the mistakes he made, and turned them into heroism.

The metal in his chest is not a sign of weakness. It is determination to live, in the hands of a genius.

Loki bit his lip and quickly turned to head back into the kitchen. Tony and Thor were still standing where he left them. Both look up as he strode in, walking directly over to Stark. He frowned, not wanting Thor to hear what he needed to say. He opted for privacy and thought to the mortal,

"You are in no way a freak or a monster, Anthony. You took your mistakes and created something inherently good. It was something you always had in you and..."

He paused and reached out, touching the reactor gently.

"This is not a symptom of hatred, the thing that makes a true monster. This is life, Anthony. This is you, strong, determined, and never-ending."

Loki chuckled and looked into his brown eyes. Speaking out loud, he said, "You never cease chattering, that is for sure."

Tony eyes had filled with wonder as the god spoke. He had never heard anyone speak this way about him or his inventions before, much less the usually snippy god. He didn't know what to do with himself or with the hand touching the reactor in his chest.

The smooth Tony Stark, always so good at accepting compliments, was at a loss for words.

His thoughts caught up with what Loki had spoken out loud. He made a face and leaned into Loki, his mouth inches away from the god's ear.

Smirking, he whispered, "Oh, I'm sure I can find words that you would find... enjoyable. "

Loki huffed with laughter, his breath tickling Stark's neck before he stepped back. Tony saw a look of raw desire pass through the God's eyes before amusement settled in.

Tony paused and frowns, gathering his thoughts. His voice shaking a little, he said, "I'm usually not one for long heart-felt speeches. I don't do the *feelings* thing very often."

He grimaced and glanced away to look at the counter. When he spoke again, it was softer and lacking his usual flippant tone.

"Do you know what it is that draws others to you? It's not the false confidence you project. It's not just the lovely green eyes that fill with emotion behind an immovable mask. It's the true and honest confidence, childlike in nature, that brings them to you. The honesty that lies behind every bitter word and the raw emotions that play behind your smile. People seek to understand you on a level that *you* pretend doesn't exist. You are not a singular relic, you are a treasure chest to be explored."

Tony took a deep breath and saw Thor openly staring at him with tears in his eyes. Stark felt a blush crawl up his neck and into his face.

Okay, that had been way too deep.

I need more alcohol before I break into poetry.

I refuse to look at Loki.

What did I say about his eyes?

There was a soft choking sound and Tony gave in to curiosity, turning to face the taller god.

Loki looked embarrassed and confused, his usually pale cheeks a nice shade of red again. The god had clearly stopped breathing, or moving, or doing anything for that matter. He was staring at Tony's forehead like the answers of the universe might pop out from it.

Tony shifted his weight from one foot to the other, the movement drawing Loki out of his trance. Tony watched the green eyes fill with an emotion he had only ever seen in Pepper's eyes before. His hand reached up to touch the god's cheek before he knew what he's doing. A spark of fear flickered through the green eyes and Loki turned away, blushing deeper.

With a quiet metallic sound, the god was suddenly gone, leaving Tony's hand grasping at air.

Nether Thor nor Tony freaked out at Loki's disappearance. Tony shuffled off, embarrassed, muttering something about checking for Gonzo.

Thor stayed, looking at the remnants of the breakfast they had just shared and wondering (again) who Gonzo was. He sniffed, pinching the bridge of his nose to keep the tears from flowing freely.

All his fears of a temporary bond had been dispelled in a moment. His initial shock stemmed from when Tony bluntly told his brother he was lying to himself. No one got away with that without bodily harm.

What came as a greater shock was his brother *returning* and speaking to Stark.

Ha badly wished he could have heard what he said, but the look on Stark's face had been enough. Loki cared for the mortal, more deeply and honestly than Thor had thought possible. Thor sighed and rested his head on the counter, recalling Tony's words before his brother disappeared.

Childlike honesty.

Thor's smile was bitter, remembering how he had abused his little brother's trust again and again. Until it was too late, until he no longer saw any trust in his eyes.

Thor suddenly felt a grave need to be near Jane. He knew he didn't deserve comfort right now, considering what his brother had been through. His thoughts continued to rumble in turmoil before Jarvis interrupted them.

"Mr. Odinson, Director Fury is at the door."

Thor snapped his head up so fast his neck snapped. He rushed out of the kitchen to find Stark.

Tony had given up looking for Loki about 2.4 seconds after leaving the kitchen. He stumbled into his bedroom weakly and started stripping off his grimy clothes.

Jarvis' voice startled Tony a little. "Sir, Loki is hiding in the training room down stairs," Jarvis said. "I thought you should know."

Tony simply nodded, kicking off his torn jeans. He wondered vaguely if he should burn his clothes; burn away the fear and grime.

As he started for the bathroom Jarvis spoke up again, sounding apologetic.

"I'm afraid Director Fury is at the door, sir."

Tony groaned and looked longingly at his shower before slouching back into his bedroom to find clothes.

He had just managed to pull on some fresh jeans when Thor came bursting in, talking in his usual loud voice. "**TONY!** Director Fury has arrived and we know not where Loki has disappeared to." Tony stared at the god, his thoughts clicking into place by order of importance.

I barely have any clothes on, but I guess he doesn't care.

Loki is hiding and probably doesn't want to be found.

Plus, I don't think I can look at him right now.

What is wrong with me? Pepper got married and I'm already flirting with some guy?

Oh yeah.

Fury.

Tony rolled his eyes and pulled on a gray t-shirt. "Thor, I will go get the sulky Muppet. I know where he is. You go let Fury in and try to..." His voice became muffled through the shirt, continuing, "...tame him as best you can. Okay?"

Loki was sitting in the darkest corner of some large training room for fight simulation. It wasn't exactly an ideal hiding place, considering his distaste for dark, quiet places had grown since his trip through the void.

He heaved a slow sigh and rested his chin on his knees, staring into the dim room. He felt ashamed at his reaction to Stark's words. It had truly shocked him to the core, to hear that not only was his life a big lie, but a mere mortal could see through his mask.

Apparently there are others who are "drawn to me" because they can see my emotions?

What utter swill.

Loki sneered at the darkness, flicking a few green flames into the air in frustration. He felt disgusted at the idea of others seeing through his calm outer shell. His sneer fell into a thoughtful frown.

Why only others?

He already knew Thor could see through most of it, because he let him. He surprised himself with how honest he had been with Thor, given how his "*brother*" had hurt him so often with lies of his own.

Why was Anthony allowed to see him bare and raw?

He let out a frustrated huff and curled his fingers. His magic pulled metal from the walls, creating little perfect balls of iron. He shot them into the wall, leaving deep holes all the way through the concrete.

A voice suddenly intruded on his silence, saying, "Don't break my house any more. You're acting like your brother."

Loki calmly turned toward the voice from the far side of the room. He could see the blue glow of Stark's metal heart light up his face ever so slightly.

He felt a moment of happiness before he scoffed, "I am in no way like that *oaf*. Besides," he smirked—and with a flick of his wrist, the wall was whole again. "I can fix it again."

Loki heard a soft chuckle as the glowing orb came closer. The blue light fell on the god's body and gave the illusion that his magic had failed, showing his original form. He looked down at his arms, frowning and turning them over in the dull light.

Tony sat down next to the god, watching Loki's eyes change color in the blue light. They were now more of an ocean gray, like a turbulent sea. He smiled as he realized he thought way too much about the god's eyes.

Loki turned to the man sitting beside him, seeing the light reflected in his staring eyes. He felt the same rush of embarrassment as before flood to his cheeks.

He tucked his chin in against his knees again and spoke quietly, "I do not wish for company right now, Stark."

Loki flinched as Tony reached out and gently flicked the god's nose. He snarled and turned to glare at the mortal, reaching up and covering his nose.

Tony scoffed with disappointment.

"What happened to calling me 'Anthony'? Do you hate me enough again to revert back to 'Stark'? "

He had asked it jokingly, but the god suddenly leaned close to him, his tone urgent.

"I do not *hate* you! I... It is simply a habit. I was raised to speak to one using their last name."

Tony did his absolute best to look at the god's eyes, not his lips. He felt his eyes wandering down the face that was so close to his. He swallowed nervously.

Alright, all this sexual tension is getting ridiculous.

He cleared his throat. "Look," he said. "I know you want to sulk in your dark Bat Cave, but Fury is here for us again."

He smiled weakly, starting to stand up. Loki also moved to stand and ended up smashing his nose into Stark's cheek. They both swore and paused, looking at one another in the dim light.

They let out an exhausted breath of air before they both snorted. In unison they thought,

"This is ridiculous."

Tony grinned widely at the god and, much to his surprise, Loki grinned back. His smile looked as though it broke his face in half as it was wide and toothy. It was so pleasant without the venom that usually formed it. Tony caught himself leaning closer to the god, their noses almost brushing. He stopped for a moment, lingering before his eyes met Loki's.

Jarvis' voice interrupted with a hint of disapproval. "Sir, Thor has run out of ways to attempt to entertain Director Fury. I'm afraid the need for your presence is dire."

Tony went still, his eyes still on Loki's, before he let out another small huff of laughter. "He tried to... *entertain* him?"

Loki saw the hungry look leave Stark's eyes and drift into amusement. He felt his smile drop a little at the prospect of speaking to the Director again. Tony suddenly offered his arm and bowed his head.

"Shall we go bless our most charitable company with our presence?"

Loki snorted and pushed past him, striding purposely at a speed with which the man could not keep up.

When the two of them walk into the room, the first thing they noticed was the lack of SHIELD agents. The second thing they noticed was that Steve and Bruce were sitting on the couch near Fury.

Tony automatically stepped in front of Loki, catching the Avengers' eyes with a searching look.

Fury rolled his eyes. "They have been debriefed, Stark," he said. "You can stop acting like an over-protective boyfriend. Sit the fuck down, we need to talk."

Both Tony and Loki shared a sneer that could melt the flesh off bone. Loki sat in the lone arm-chair, suddenly aware that the whole gang actually was there, as Natasha and Clint had been lurking in the far corner. He spared a glance at his brother, pondering a moment what sort of amusement he had attempted. Based on the look on his face, Fury had chewed him out.

His eyes drifted over the two spies, giving each a nod in greeting. Surprisingly, they both nodded back before glancing at Tony as he sat on the arm of Loki's chair. Loki felt heat coming from Tony's body which, also surprisingly, made him relax considerably.

His gaze went to the doctor, who looked a bit green around the edges of his face. Loki could smell his fear, whether it was a fear of himself or of Loki, he did not know. He offered a small smile to the man, hoping to seem less of a threat.

Banner's eyes slid off him and went to Stark, with a look of relief and pure joy at seeing his old friend again.

Loki supposed that out of all of them, the two scientists would be closest. He paused a moment to focus on the Captain, feeling the hatred radiating off of him from across the room. He didn't bother with any form of acknowledgment, which seemed to piss the man off more. He finally settled on Director Fury, who wore his usual leathers coupled with his usual sour look.

The Director looked the god in the eye. "I want you to come into SHIELD and cooperate with us," he said bluntly.

Both Tony and Thor opened their mouths to speak before Loki sent a quiet "*Shut up*" to each of them. He smiled slowly and leaned his head on his hand. His voice sounding bored, he said, "Why, *exactly*, is that necessary? I thought we already went through everything. I even gave you a little present... was that not sufficient enough to slake your thirst for power, Mr. Fury?"

The Director's eyes narrowed before he smirked. "That's the thing, Loki," he responded. "We don't know how many *other* powerful weapons you have stashed away on your person. We also don't want you running around Earth with magic." His smile widened. "We got two options here, kids. One, Loki comes in to SHIELD and stays there permanently. Option two is Loki comes in and lets us test our new shiny machine on him. You know, the one that sucks the magic out of Twinkle Toes here."

The silence after was nearly palpable. Tony felt like he was going to be sick. Neither option was what they agreed on last night. How many caskets did Fury think Loki could fit in his back pocket? Loki sent a small thought to Stark.

"Anthony, do not say anything yet."

Tony glanced at the god sitting next to him, and nodded.

Director Fury watched the two of them carefully, noticing for the second time the strangeness of their behavior. They had done it before, when they first showed up again, he remembered. Secret smiles, half heard conversations, as though they were silently communicating. He frowned and continued to watch, waiting for an answer.

At last Loki spoke up, his voice low and venomous, drawing out the first words slowly. "Director... Fury. How did it feel when you lost your eye?"

Loki smirked and tilted his head to one side.

Fury visibly stiffened. Sitting up straighter he snarled, "I don't see how that's any of your fucking business, Loki."

"It IS my *fucking* business because what you intend to do to me by removing my magic will hurt a thousand times more than that. It will leave me a thousand times more *blind* than you are now."

Everyone in the room had flinched when Loki swore, looking anywhere but at the god. They knew he had been controlled, just like Clint, but somehow they were having a problem feeling bad about Loki going through pain. Tony, on the other hand was livid. He bit the inside of his lip hard enough to draw blood.

This is fucking BULLSHIT.

Fury damn well knows we can handle Loki. We did it before.

Loki GAVE him an amazing powerful object as a promise, and yet here he is, telling them it wasn't enough.

Tony stood up abruptly, startling everyone. Loki looked up at him in surprise and saw his anger boiling over.

He jumped up and touched the short man's shoulder. Tony glared at the god before twisting away and stalking out of the room. Loki looked confused for a moment before an expression of understanding settled on his face.

He turned to the group and sighed. "Look, you will not trust me, no matter what I say," Loki said. "I would like the opportunity to show you through actions, rather than words, that I am capable of helping others. *Yes*, I have always had this snide personality, and that shan't change. But none of you actually know me, the real me. The Loki you met in New York was so unlike my true nature, it was *humiliating*. I know I took my anger out on humans before, in my attack on Thor..."

Loki frowned, gesturing with his arms in frustration. "I can't apologize for that enough. I was, as Stark put it, 'Throwing a Tantrum.'"

That got a laugh out of Clint and Bruce, while Natasha simply smirked. Loki sighed heavily and brushed a hand through his hair. He suddenly remembered that he never checked his hair after the fire. His eyes grew wide for a moment, distracted by his own thoughts. Everyone in the room stared at him, confused by his sudden fearful look. Shaking his head a little, he glanced back at them, realizing he had stopped in the middle of speaking.

Well, that probably didn't make a good impression of sanity.

It seemed to have made some sort of impression though, as Bruce frowned and leaned forward to speak. "Loki, I of all people know what it's like to feel like two... people." He grimaced and went on, "I feel inclined to believe you, mostly because apparently you were alone with Tony on a planet for a few days, and you didn't kill him." He smiled at Loki and shrugged. "I probably would have."

Clint snorted and nodded, saying, "I *definitely* would have, especially after that shit with Budapest."

Loki found himself looking at Rogers, feeling a small stem of hope that the team could convince Fury to let him stay under their watch. The man was harder to read than before, his face heavily guarded.

When he noticed Loki looking at him expectantly, the Captain let out a sigh.

"Look," he said. "I know now that you were under control, but it's still hard to look at you without seeing the crazed maniac who led an entire army into New York City." Loki's frown deepened before Rogers looked up, smiling weakly.

"You got Clint and Agent Romanoff to trust you enough to leave you with your brother and Tony. After that, I feel as though I can't particularly argue anymore about this."

With this he looked directly at Fury. "Director Fury, considering the trust he has put in us and his 'peace offering', I feel we should allow him to remain under observation. Stark's home has one of the best security systems in the world, and this, plus having an Avenger or two around at all times, should suffice in keeping an eye on him."

Fury's face steamed with anger. He glared around the room and paused on Thor.

"What, you're not going to cast your *vote*? I thought you of all would be the first to jump on the 'Let's save Loki train'."

Thor shrugged and smiled. "I trusted you already knew my feelings on the matter. I felt no need to speak up."

Fury growled and glared around the room again.

It was getting pretty hostile in here, Fury thought.

There was a shuffling sound as Tony entered the room again, wearing a single gauntlet on his right arm. All eyes went to him as he walked over and leaned against Loki's armchair again, crossing his arms. There was an expectant silence where he said absolutely nothing at all.

The threat had been clear enough without words.

The Director felt his blood pressure rise,
This little prick was threatening me?

Fury stood suddenly and snarled at Loki,

"For *now*, you may stay here under observation. I will have people in and out in a constant circulation. Thor, I want you to head back to Asgard and let them know the whole story. I don't want anymore fucking surprises."

He looked around the room once more before leaving, his long, black coat flapping behind him.

A collective sigh filled the room, causing everyone to glance around and laugh nervously.

Natasha stretched and moved towards the door to follow Fury. On her way out, she glanced back, saying, "I can't believe I'm saying this but, it's nice to officially meet you... Loki Odinson."

With that, both she and Clint left, the archer tipping an invisible hat to Tony. Doctor Banner stood up suddenly and rushed across the room. Tony let out a happy laugh and hugged the man tightly, patting his back.

Thor also joined them from behind the couch and smiled warmly at his brother. "See, my brother," he said happily. "My friends have your back."

Loki let out a small grunt of laughter. "Most grudgingly, yet..." He turned and looked at Bruce and the Captain. "You have my thanks for this."

A strange expression passed over Rogers' face before he stood up and nodded. "I need to get to know you better. I will need to readjust to you," said the soldier.

Tony smiled and tilted his head "Sounds like you should ask him out on a date, Stars and Stripes," he said.

Loki spun on his heel and snapped at him mentally, "ANTHONY!"

Tony visibly flinched away before laughing. Rogers looked between the two of them and smiled wearily. "Nice to have your smart ass back, Stark. I'll see you around."

He nodded to Thor and Bruce before taking his leave. Bruce left a few moments later, leaving the three of them standing alone again in the living room. Tony looked down at his gauntlet and frowned.

I still need to blow something up, dammit. Maybe I can call Fury back.

Thor watched Tony as he powered up the gauntlet a little and let it die again. He was about to say something when suddenly Tony put his hand up and shot a blast through the window, shattering the large pane of glass instantly.

Both gods flinched before Loki rushed forward to see if Stark had been hit with any glass, yelling, "What Í helvíti Óðins was that about?! Anthony, you're bleeding..." He touched the mortal's forearms gently, sending little sprigs of green across Tony's skin.

Tony frowned and looked vaguely apologetic. "Sorry. It just kept building up as he talked. You know what I need? A drink."

He beamed at the two gods and glanced at the window.

"Jarvis, let me know if anything larger than a bug comes through that window. "

However, before Jarvis could respond, Loki flicked a wrist and the glass cleared from the floor, fitting back into the window frame perfectly.

Tony whistled appreciatively and looked at Loki.

"Wait, you fixed my roof too, didn't you? You're a regular handy man!"

Thor laughed and came forward, smacking both of their backs harder than Tony had thought possible.

"Let us drink and celebrate! We have much to be thankful for, as you both returned safely!"

Loki rolled his eyes but allowed himself to be dragged off to join the oaf and the mortal for a drink.

Chapter End Notes

Review/ comment please. Let me know your thoughts. :3

When He's Bad, He's Very Very Bad

Chapter Notes

NOTE: The words in Italics that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

I apologize ahead of time.

Chpt 8

(When he's bad, he's very very bad)

Tony's cheek was pressed against the marble counter in the smaller kitchenette near his room. This could be listed as his permanent address, considering how much time he'd spent there lately.

Placed strategically in front of his eyes was a glass of Crown Royal whiskey. He watched as an air bubble drifted up past the ice and lingered near the surface.

It had been three weeks since the two gods and himself drank themselves stupid to celebrate not being dead. It had started out a mellow and almost sullen event, until Tony found out that it took a lot stronger drink to get the gods drunk.

"What do you mean, Midgardian *WATER*?!" Tony had yelled angrily.

Tony was never one to turn away from a challenge, and so over the course of a night they drank his entire collection of alcohol. The majority of the three liquor cabinets, one mini bar, and one full bar ended up in Thor. They had settled outside on one of the expansive decks, their drunken voices reaching up to the stars. At some point Thor started singing poems about his lady-love.

Thor bellowed in a sing-song voice,

"My fair Lady Jane,

You are not plain.

Your laughter bright

Your eyes alight.

And your lovely rear

I hold so dear!"

He burst into torrents of laughter, with Tony joining in and slapping his shoulder. Loki snorted with distaste as he took a sip of his drink. "Thor, I'm sure if she heard of this you would be very much alone in the world. " Loki smiled sarcastically and pressed the cold glass to his cheek. Thor pouted at his brother while Tony looked thoughtful.

Tony's face became serious. "I have a poem about love," he said.

He looked down at his drink and took a swig, finishing the glass. He stood, swaying slightly. The gods cast a concerned glance at one another. Stark looked up into the night sky and sighed softly, his hand moving over his heart.

He spoke slowly, "Your skin is as pale as the moon in winter. Your delicate fingers, strong yet feminine. " There was a pause in which the gods looked at each other again, frowning. Tony continued, "I always dream of running my manly digits through your greasy hair. Your posture is that of a woman, which you are not. "

There was another long dramatic pause until Thor grumbled in confusion, "Not?"

"Loki, let me be your Brokeback Mountain. Let us ride off into the sunset, like cowboys." Tony stood still as he finished, his hand still over his heart.

"Ow!" Tony shouted as Loki's glass bounced off his head. "Is this how you show your love for me? I recite you poetry and you abuse me."

Thor and Tony burst out laughing, each giggling to the point of tears. Loki glared at Stark, his eyes flashing dangerously before a sly smile formed.

"A man with an Iron will.
Often spouts amounts of swill.
He has no class
And shall not last.
For he has so little skill."

Loki ended with a bow. Thor fell off of his deck chair, clutching his stomach with laughter.

This went on for longer than Tony could remember. The poetry battle eventually came to a point where they needed paper to work things out, as their minds had become far too intoxicated to remember one word before the other. The next thing Stark remembered was sunlight glaring through his eyelids. Expecting a massive hangover, he lifted his head cautiously. He groaned and peeled off a piece of paper from his cheek and peered at it. It read:

To Lokers:

*Roses are red,
Violets are blue.
Put them together
And it makes you.*

*The lies they told you
About being a beast.
None of it was true
Believe me.*

The last part was mostly scribbled out and smudged with what looked like tear stains. Tony frowned at his inelegant writing and looked around him. They were still on the deck, all three of them surrounded by crumpled papers and bottles. Tony let out an exhausted laugh, causing Loki to stir. The raven haired god turned over on his deck chair, his eyes blinking at the bright sun. Tony smiled down at him.

"Good morning my most formidable poet," he said, his eyes falling on Loki's hair.

"In the bright sunlight
Your greasy hair is set alight.
Not unlike when you set it on fire
This time it is less dire
I love the- "

Loki leapt up and covered Tony's mouth with a hand. His eyes were narrowed in anger but his lips were tilted up at the edges.

Loki let out a breath and said wearily, "I think it is time we stop with the poetry. Your mangling of the tempo and phrasing is atrocious." He shifted closer, leaning out of his lawn chair. "Besides, Anthony, if you wanted to tell me you love me..."
Loki murmured, bringing his face inches away from Stark's. "... Actions speak louder than words."

Tony sighed at the memory, recalling the cold feeling of Loki's fingers on his lips. Things had been strangely comfortable between them over that first week. Drinking together and laughing at Thor as if they had always done so. In the week after, however, everything changed.

"TONY!?"

Pepper's voice could have cracked glass. As it was, it shattered Tony's eardrums. He had been in the middle of chasing around Dum-e after the robot misunderstood an order and pulled out half the wiring from one of his suits. He froze mid-step and let his outstretched arms drop to his side. Turning around slowly, his gaze met her watery eyes. He thought,

*She looks even more beautiful.
Maybe it's because I haven't seen her in a month.*

Maybe it's because she's married.

He didn't have long to look at her before she threw herself into his arms. He didn't bother to hold back the happiness he felt. Hugging her tightly, Tony chuckled into her shoulder. "Hello again, Mrs. Smith."

That apparently had been the wrong thing to say. She thrust herself out of his grip and looked at him with a mix of fear and guilt in her eyes.

"Oh god. You know..." she said, panic rising in her voice. Her mouth trembled a little as she gazed at Tony.

He smiled weakly and put his arms up in mock surrender. "Hey, I understand completely," he insisted. "I had no idea I would be gone for so long. For me it was only a few days, for you it was too long."

Her eyebrows flew up. "A few days?! You were gone for *over a year*, Tony! "

Tony stepped forward and placed his hands on her shoulders, rubbing them in a calming manner. His

eyebrows creased as the smile slipped from his lips.

"Peps, I know it was a year for you," he said, trying to keep his voice level. "Time moves differently when you space travel, apparently. I was on another planet for a few days—I come back and it's been a year. I know I can't understand completely how you feel, but I get it. I get why you're upset and I understand why you married Jonas." He paused and bumped his forehead against hers gently before continuing, "I don't know if this is what you want to hear, but I'm okay. I've been okay with it for a while. "

He heard her let out a shuddering gasp before she wrapped her arms around him again. Tony nuzzled his face into her shoulder and breathed in her familiar scent.

She's so warm and smells like apples.

Must be some sort of shampoo.

Loki's hugs are fucking freezing and He smells like...

leather...and spices...and something else.

There was a soft gasp from the doorway behind Stark. Tony let Pepper go and turned to see Loki standing there, his eyes went wide with surprise. Tony caught a flash of confusion and pain. Without thinking, he rushed over to the god and gripped his shoulders. Tony looked into Loki's eyes and thought,

"Lokes, she just found out I was back. I wasn't trying any moves on her or any shit like that, okay?"

Loki's face changed into the usual veil of disinterest. Even through the mind link, his voice sounded impassive.

" There is no need for an explanation, Stark. What you do with her is none of my business. "

Tony frowned and squeezed the god's shoulders more urgently.

" So it's back to 'Stark' now? Look, I can't explain it but I need you to know that there's nothing between us anymore. "

Pepper cleared her throat and spoke up. "Directory Fury had mentioned that Loki was here under watch of his brother, but didn't say a word about Tony," she said. "I came to see how Thor was doing and to check up on the house. I didn't expect to see Tony, much less find the house still standing."

Tony smirked at the unspoken message and thought to Loki,

"Go figure. Thor is the one destroying my house, not you. "

Loki let out a huff of laughter before responding.

"I believe you have been doing some damage yourself."

The god glanced at Pepper with a bitter smile before twisting out of Tony's grip and walking out of the room. Frowning in confusion, Stark turned around to a curious Pepper. "Sorry about that, he's not bad. Well, he's not *as bad*. There was this whole mind control thing and all that."

Pepper tilted her head and crossed her arms with a smile. "I see. So this is why you are 'okay' with

everything? Moving on a little fast aren't you, playboy?"

Tony's mouth dropped open a moment before quickly snapping it shut. He turned away and busied himself at the bar as he gathered his thoughts.

"Okay, so maybe I've thought about it a *little* bit. It doesn't matter though because he won't ever..." He faltered. His hands stopped moving, standing there and staring at the ice. Tony heard the familiar sound of her heels as she came closer and smiled sadly.

"I'm sorry," he said solemnly, "for everything."

"Everyone is alright, Tony. Things worked out on their own as usual," she said. Her hand gently patted his back. "I'm going to leave now before Loki comes back and sets me on fire for hugging you. I'll see you again with some paperwork to set you back up with the company. You're going to be really busy once everyone knows you're alive."

She hugged him tightly and headed towards the door, before looking back once more. "And Tony, I think you have a very good chance with him. From what I saw, I don't think you're the only one 'thinking' about it."

The next week was hell. Tony didn't see the god for the rest of the day after Pepper's visit. Admittedly, he hadn't looked very hard for him. They had been spending so much time together that he had become used to finding Loki suddenly right in front of him. The next morning he woke up to find his hair bright blond. He stared at it for several minutes before screaming wordlessly at the bathroom mirror.

Tony ran from his room into the hallway yelling, "**LOOOOKKKKK!!!?**"

Thor exploded out of the room he had claimed as his own, hammer in hand and hair a mess. They collided into each other in the hall, sending Tony flying. In the confusion, Thor failed to recognize him and raised his hammer to attack.

Tony squeaked and put his hands up in defense. "Thor! Thor, it's me goddammit! Loki changed my fucking hair!"

Thor stumbled to a stop and squinted at Tony. His eyebrows went up before the hall echoed with his loud laugh.

"Oh, Tony. You have my apologies," he said, not sounding remotely apologetic. "It does not look bad, though!"

Tony glared. "I look more like you than I would ever want to. Where is your dearest brother so that I may pull out all of his greasy hair?"

Thor pouted at the comment and shrugged. With a mutter, he turned to wander back into his room. Tony continued to glare at the god's receding back before he stomped off down the hall. Though he stopped stomping shortly after he realized he had no idea where Loki had been sleeping since they returned to earth. The room he had offered him never looked slept in. Tony frowned and decide to take a chance.

"Loki? Mind meeting me in the training room? We need to talk."

He waited for a response for a while before giving up and heading to the elevator. He found a dark training room and frowned further, disappointed at being avoided. Sitting down in the corner, he sighed.

"Stark."

Tony jumped about a foot in the air, his heart racing. Squinting his eyes, he could just make out a form in the other corner. Tony crawled closer and realized it was the god wrapped up in a blanket.

"Hey, what are you doing down here like this? Please tell me you aren't sleeping here," Tony said. His only response was a soft chuckle.

Tony remembered his hair with irritation, yet crawled closer. "Also, what the *fuck*!? You didn't seem *that* mad about Pepper, so what's with my hair?"

Tony was close enough so that the light from his reactor lit up Loki's face. His heart stopped at the sight. The god's eyes were clouded with that half-crazed loathing look, as they had back in New York.

Loki's face split into a nasty smirk. "Why, Stark," he said, his voice dripping with acid. "I believe I told you it was none of my business what you do with that female mortal. About your hair, it was a simple prank because I simply *dislike* you."

Tony's voice rose angrily. " *Dislike* me? Since when, exactly, have you disliked me this much? We were fine until yesterday, so don't tell me there's not a fucking correlation between the two."

Loki barked out a cruel laugh before jerking Tony closer by his chin. "I have *always* disliked you, Stark," he hissed. "I was simply treating you as respectfully as possible seeing as you are my host. Since I am no longer in any immediate danger from Director Fury and his toy soldiers, I see no reason to keep up this game with you."

Tony felt some large and happy part of him shatter. He was unaware of the exact moment when he had stopped breathing while the god spoke his poison. Tony stared into the god's cruel eyes for a long while, searching for any sign that what he had said was untrue. When he found nothing, no hint of a lie, he let out a strangled sound in dismay.

Loki gazed back angrily into the mortal's eyes as the man seemed to search desperately for something. There was sudden choked sob before Tony pushed himself away. Confused, Loki looked up at Tony's anguished face looking down at him. As he watched, Tony's features morphed into an impassive mask. The only hint of his emotions lay in his sharp eyes.

Tony stood for a moment longer before he said in a quiet voice, "I understand." He walked away without another word.

Loki sat staring at the door for hours after the mortal had left. A dark, painful weight had settled into his chest and would not leave. Loki's mind was tormented by Stark's obviously pained expression before he spoke.

What do I do now?, thought Loki.

It's too late, and you know whatever friendship you had was born out of a foolish situation. Tony is home now with his woman. He has no need for your company.

Yes, but she's married . She has no need for him.

Loki stood up sharply and gritted his teeth. None of this mattered to him, it was meaningless.

Everything is meaningless.

Tony had escaped the situation the only way he knew how.
He drank and drank and drank.

He drank through Thor's worrying and pathetic attempts at patching things up between Loki and himself. He drank through a weird speech from Rogers. Steve seemed to be torn between sympathy and stern mothering. Tony even drank through Pepper's visit, although he was considerably nicer to her than the other two.

Here I am, still drinking.
Thank god they don't expect me to give any speeches yet.

He stared at the glass from his place on the counter before sitting up abruptly and throwing it across the room. Tony gave a satisfied giggle when the glass shattered dramatically all over the wall and floor.

Jarvis spoke up in a worried tone. "Sir, I've tried to warn you for some time now that your blood alcohol levels has reached a dangerously high concentration. Shall I call for an ambulance?"

Tony laughed and tried to stand up, his hand slipping off the counter and sending him sprawling on the floor. He continued to laugh hysterically even as Thor came rushing in to see what was wrong. When the god was unable to stop his manic laughter, he pinched Tony's nose, causing him to choke a little and gasp for air.

Tony gazed up at Thor with unfocused eyes. "I don't... I didn't mean to laugh."
His eyes started to water. "I don't even *want* to laugh."

Thor frowned and rested Tony against the cabinets. His eyes began to darken with anger and disappointment. "Tony, if I had known you would have become so attached to my brother, I would have stopped this," he said quietly before looking away. "No, I lie. I would not have warned you. I thought he had felt something towards you as well. You have my deepest apologies for the suffering his actions have caused, yet again. "

Tony coughed and let out a weak laugh. "Don't bother apologizing, Goldilocks. It's my own damn fault for not understanding a damn thing about him. I'm an idddiioott... as usual. A geenaasss id..." Tony started to slur heavily as he spoke before his eyes dropped closed and his head fell on to his chest. Thor shook him gently, concerned at his sudden unconscious state.

"Thor, sir," said Jarvis. "I'm afraid Mr. Stark is suffering from alcohol poisoning. If he isn't treated soon he may die."

Thor looked around in a panic before scooping up Stark in his arms and rushing out of the small kitchen.

Running into the hall, he screamed, "BROTHER! I am need of your assistance!"

Thor hurried into the living room where he found the dark-haired god sitting on a couch with a book. Loki looked up surprised at his brother's sudden appearance before glancing at the body in his arms.

His eyebrows furrowed as he asked, "What, pray tell, is *that*? What is going on, Thor?"

Thor came rushing up to him, nearly shoving Tony's limp body into his face.

"Please, Loki, heal him! The voice says he is going to die! That he has been poisoned!"

Loki's lips drew together tightly before he stepped forward off the couch and placed a hand on Stark's forehead. He sent his magic throughout Tony's body, feeling the poison within that was slowly destroying his system. Loki's eyebrows came together more sharply.

"He really is dying..."

Thor's face filled with anguish as he looked down at Tony's pale visage. He said, his voice barely a whisper, "Please heal him... he has poisoned himself because of what you said to him."

Loki's eyes went wide as the hand on Tony's forehead began to tremble just a little. Swallowing his fear, Loki directed his brother to the couch. "Lay him here, then. This isn't going to be easy," he said softly.

Thor's concerns grew as he lay the mortal down on the couch. He stepped back and let Loki do his work. Loki moved in quickly, touching different points on Tony's body and muttering a spell under his breath. Each location he touched started to glow brighter as he spoke. Loki paused with his fingers over Tony's heart, sensing the ever slowing beat.

He turned to Thor and spoke again softly. "Parts of his body have already shut down. I honestly do not know if this will work completely."

Thor shook his head. "*Try!* It is better than letting him go."

Loki turned back to Tony's body and paused in his work, thinking,

Calm yourself before you make a deadly mistake.

He breathed out a sigh of air and touched a finger over Tony's heart.

There was an electric snapping sound as the points connected in a stream of light. Stark's body suddenly convulsed as the last current of light met up with Loki's finger over his heart. Tony's eyes flew open as his body violently jerked up, knocking Loki backwards.

The room filled with Tony's scream.

Thor rushed forward at the sound, reaching out to calm Tony. The mortal flinched away with a startled squeak and scrambled backwards away from the hands coming towards him. Tony's wide and sunken eyes looked all around the room in a panic before settling on Loki. A look of recognition flashed across his face and he jumped forward, grabbing Loki's shirt in his fists.

"Loki ah Loki..." he babbled, moving closer to Loki's face. "I saw it. I *saw* it. I s-saw... Loki. It's there. It..."

Loki reached up and touched Tony's face gently, his eyes filled with concern. He stroked Tony's cheek with a thumb. "Anthony, calm down now please," he said soothingly. "Your body just went through a massive shock."

Loki's mind was abruptly bombarded with Tony's panicked thoughts.

There's something there. There's something speaking and singing and it's there all the time. Loki. Loki it knows you. It's there.

Loki stared at the man as fear crept into his body. Tony's eyes continued to stare at Loki with a fear the god had never seen in the mortal before.

Tony, still inches away from the god's face, whispered,

"There's something in the darkness calling your name."

In Sickness and In Health

Chapter Summary

Tony is okay. Or is he? He might be a lot better if he wasn't haunted by new memories, or having Fury poke and prod at him.

Chapter Notes

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

This is a much longer chapter.

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See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chpt 9

(In Sickness and In Health)

There's something about a shared fear that draws people together. Tony had collapsed into a small coma for a few days before waking up starving and irritated. Afterwards, he and Loki grew closer than ever. Well, after the god changed Tony's hair color back to normal.

Tony outright refused to talk about what it was he saw or heard when he was dying. Thor begged Tony to tell him even the smallest of things about it. Seeing how hard it was to scare his brother, Thor was very concerned. Loki didn't seem to bother asking the mortal more about it, as though he already knew enough. On occasion, Tony seemed he might tell something to Thor until Loki swooped down and said something to him via mind link, promptly shutting him up. Thor noticed that the two of them hardly spoke out loud anymore. It irritated him to the point where he made it mandatory for them to speak when they were around him. At least at dinner.

"I'm not trying to break up our dinner party, but I have a press conference in ten minutes. No time to chat!" Tony said, already half-dressed in an alarmingly pink dress shirt and gray trousers. He shoved a roll into his mouth and wandered off to find the rest of his outfit. Loki looked after him longingly before he noticed Thor watching him.

He glared at his brother and snapped, "What is it?"

Thor chuckled and smiled warmly at his younger brother. He felt jealous, at first, of the mind link that Stark and Loki shared. It was much stronger than the one he had with Loki when they were children. He made that discovery when Stark had gone to a meeting in New York to confirm that he wasn't dead. Two hours after Tony caught his plane, Thor found Loki sitting on the couch chuckling to himself. Thor had tilted his head with confusion as Loki ignored him, his face showing an array of expressions. He realized his brother was speaking to Tony, even though the man was half way across the country already.

Thor now picked at his dinner, feeling a mix of emotions. "Although I am glad you and Tony have become close again, I am still unhappy about the circumstances that caused you to become close. He should not have been pushed into such a tormented state. He truly thought you did not care for him," he said before looking his brother in the eye wearily. "You never fully explained this thing that now haunts you both. Loki, if I can help you, let me!"

Loki stared at his brother, thinking hard. He knew that Thor would be unable to help, seeing as he wasn't even currently sure how to name the threat. But he also knew that his stubborn older brother would never let it go.

He returned his focus to Thor. "I know you *mean* well, but it is not something you can fight. I will explain more when I know more. So, until then, be patient," said Loki, his lips holding a shadow of a smile. "As for Anthony, you know I regret being the cause of that entire situation. I do not promise anything, but I don't plan on letting things go that way again."

"Let *what* go what way, Lokes?"

Loki twisted around quickly, seeing Tony standing there adjusting his cuff links. He eyed the man to see how much he heard, but there was nothing in his face that gave it away. So Loki lied. "I don't plan on letting Fury do anything to me."

Tony strode forward and swatted Loki's hair, flipping it up into his face. Loki remained still, frozen in confused horror. "What... did you just *do*?"

Stark laughed and took out his phone to snap a picture. Loki flipped his hair back quickly and stood up, looking at the device with peeved curiosity. Tony laughed again after seeing the picture and showed him his phone.

"There," said Tony, "A new background picture. I needed something to go with my 'Loki's Ass' ring tone."

Loki growled and grabbed his phone out of his hand, squinting at the picture. He stood for a moment holding the phone to his face before sighing and handing it back. "I'm glad you find amusement from such simple things. You truly are much like my brother. I think the blond suited you."

Tony made a face at Loki and turned to Thor saying, "See how much he loves you? He wants *two* of you. One of you is just not enough, buddy. Time to make some copies." He gestured to Thor to get a move on.

Thor laughed and shook his head. "I'm afraid my brother is the only one of us who can make duplicates of himself. It is a part of his magic, not some godly power."

Tony raised an eyebrow and gave Loki a leering smile.

The things we could do with that...

"So," Tony said cheerfully. "let's make a soccer team and call it 'The Blue Man Group'."

Loki shook his head and looked over at his similarly confused brother. "Do you understand any of the references? I only *now* know what a Gonzo is. Which, by the way," he said as he turned to glare at Tony. "Is nothing *remotely* like me. For one thing, it's not even alive. I don't particularly find it pleasant to be compared to inanimate objects."

Tony's grin grew wide. He had waited eagerly to explain his references. "Lokes, he's a blue alien who is the last of his kind. The big nose is just a plus!" Loki snarled as Tony patted his back. "If it helps, he isn't inanimate at all. He has a nice human hand shoved up his butt that—"

Loki jabbed a finger into Tony's forehead before stalking off. Tony let out a nervous laugh that sounded flat and lifeless. Thor looked at the mortal and realized Tony's hands were shaking. "Tony... Tony, what is wrong?" he asked worriedly.

Stark glanced at him, and for a moment the god could read panic in his eyes.

Tony managed to respond with his usual flippant tone. "Nothing's wrong, Blondie. Since when *haven't* I made fun of your brother?"

Thor stood up, coming around the table to get a better look at Stark. He noticed Tony's dark shadowed eyes and the fact that his whole body was shaking with small tremors. His eyebrows creased with worry.

"Tony," Thor began. "The press conference is not what is bothering you, is it?"

Tony smiled at the god's concerned voice. It was oddly comforting to know some people could see through his façade. He looked down and adjusted his cuffs for the sixth time. "You know what's bothering me. The same thing for the past week. I just get a little twitchy leaving my house is all."

Thor slapped Tony's back with his usual rough manner. "Tony, my brother should come with you then! His magic can protect you, should you need it."

Stark laughed a real laugh this time and raised an eyebrow. "How well do you think that would go over? 'Hello everyone, I'm back, *oh yes* look! The very same Loki who blew up New York. Don't mind him, he's just here for *moral support*.'"

Thor snorted as he looked over Tony's shoulder. "You needn't worry about people recognizing him," he said, nodding his head towards the door. "It seems my brother was already planning on going anyway."

Tony spun around and stared at the figure in the doorway. A woman was leaning against the frame, smirking an oh-so-familiar smirk. His eyes moved down the shorter body and noted that it was clothed in Loki's shirt and leather pants. The clothes suddenly rippled, changing into a smart gray suit jacket and skirt. As always, there was a hint of green peeking out in the form of a lacy shirt. After the change in outfit, she came forward and stood in front of Tony. Her height was nearly the same as his.

"Wait, what did you do with your height?" Tony burst out loudly. "Where does the mass go?" He waved a hand over her head to illustrate the lack of Loki length.

The woman—*Loki*—laughed in a higher pitch than Tony had expected. "If you must know,

Anthony, the mass is displaced by magic. I carry it with me just as I carried the casket."

As amused as Loki felt from watching Stark's face move through awe and confusion, he was finding himself slightly uncomfortable. Usually towering over the man, Loki was unaccustomed to being on the same level as Stark. He was unsure if he liked it or not. The man dominated the room by his presence alone. Being at eye level let Loki see how the mortal held himself with a powerful grace that reflected in every movement.

Except when he's drunk, thought Loki.

Tony looked taller, stronger, and his eyes held more confidence than he normally showed around the god. Tony was standing over him without actually being a inch taller than Loki's female form. Loki did not like to be dominated, ever.

Well, maybe just this once.

At this level he could also see the tremors that shook through the mortal's hands. He had noticed Stark would stay awake at night down in his workshop. He hadn't slept more than a few hours here or there ever since he awoke from the coma. Loki knew exactly what had frightened Tony. Loki also knew that he was the only person who could help.

The god sighed in his feminine voice. "Anthony," he began before Tony shivered. Loki took note of it and tucked it away in the back of his mind. "If you are done ogling my body in the name of science, we are going to be late."

Just as they were leaving, Dr. Banner arrived waving some papers at Stark. Tony tried to cling to Bruce, claiming science was more important than press, but the woman-Loki dragged him away.

Making a fuss, Tony yelled back at his friend, "Bruce! I shall return to thee ASAP!"

The press conference was its usual boring self. The few exceptions were when a few fan girls screamed about how happy they were that he wasn't dead. He performed his usual wink and smile but felt more hollow than he used to. He thought to himself,

This used to make me feel great, what the fuck is missing now?

The second interesting thing was when Nick Fury showed up at the end and hauled Tony's ass to an 'Avengers Meeting'. He had tried to include his lovely lady friend but the Director just glared. Apparently this was a capital 'M' meeting, no outsiders allowed.

"Leave your date at home, Stark." Fury said. "Unless you're afraid Loki will steal her away?" He eyed the shorter woman with distaste. Or perhaps he was just looking at her, as it was hard to tell when his expression only had one setting. Tony let out a snort of laughter and looked over at the woman.

He smiled knowingly and thought to Loki,
"Don't go stealing my date, Lokes. I'll be back soon."

The woman rolled her eyes and waited until the Director's car was out of sight before disappearing. Loki reappeared in the living room of the California penthouse in his normal form, once more in his favorite green tunic. He enjoyed a few seconds of normality before he heard a strangled squeak from behind him and turned around to investigate.

Oh... the scientist was still here.

He smiled and sat down in the arm-chair furthest away from the beast. "Hello again, Dr. Banner. Why are you still here if there is an Avengers meeting? "

Bruce's forehead creased with confusion. "What Avengers meeting?" he asked, shifting uncomfortably. "Thor just said he was going to see Jane."

A small thought began to grow in the back of Loki's mind. "Director Fury just dragged Anthony away to a supposed meeting only moments ago," Loki said as he observed the doctor taking out his cell phone. Loki watched him, hiding his nervousness behind a calm but unamused expression. Before Bruce finished dialing, there was the deafening sound of the front door being blown open.

Tony propped his expensive shoes on the meeting table, much to the obvious annoyance of Fury. He lived to piss off the Director.

"So, not much of an Avengers meeting when the two big guys aren't here. Did they miss the call?"

Steve's eyebrows went up as he said with a hint of surprise, "I'm surprised *even you* are here. I assumed you were still passed out from binge drinking."

Tony looked at Rogers with a small frown. "I will *not* be drinking again. You can stop worrying, *mom*."

Both spies and Fury joined Steve in giving Stark an incredulous look.

"You aren't ever going to drink again?" Steve said, laughing in disbelief. "What on God's green earth could make you to do that? Did pigs fly?"

Tony flashed a quick bitter smile around the room. "I died a little bit. Anyway, what's this meeting about?"

"You **DIED**?!" Clint shouted, jumping out of his seat. Natasha leaned forward a little and pulled the man back into his seat. She shared a similar expression of worry.

Steve was clenching the edge of the table, his inhuman strength causing small dents in the metal. "You almost died and you didn't *tell* anyone?! Stark, what happened?"

Tony sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I actually *died*. Not 'almost' died. I flat-out was gone for a few minutes there." He groaned with irritation before continuing, "Loki brought me back since I wasn't that far gone. Whatever that means."

Everyone around the table continued to stare at him in disbelief. Tony's expression became more serious. "I won't be drinking again. At all. *Ever*. There was something..." he tapered off, his face going pale. Tony tried to stay nonchalant about it and forced his body to stop shaking.

He said in a smaller voice, "Look, can we just get on with this meeting? "

Rogers looked as though he'd keep pressing the matter, until a smack in the chest from Clint stopped him.

Fury cleared his throat. "I wanted to talk to you guys all together, but I'm not exactly gonna leave the psychopath home alone. Thor can stay with him. And as for Doctor Banner, he should be here." He looked at his watch and then at the door, as if Bruce would magically walk in on command.

Tony raised an eyebrow and leaned further back in his chair. "Brucey," he said, "is at my penthouse right now waiting for me to get back."

Fury tensed, shouting, "Why the fuck is he there?! I called him in!"

Tony couldn't suppress a sneer. "Don't get your panties in a knot. He had some things to show me. Give him another call... or, hang on," he paused as the Director's voice filled the room repeating "Loki's Ass", "...someone's calling *me*."

Fury's eyes narrowed as Tony snapped open his phone to answer cheerfully. "Hello you Mean Green Smashing Machine, why aren't you at our super secret Girl Scout meeting?"

There was a pause before Loki's voice purred through the phone. "I'm afraid your scientist friend is trying not to turn into the green smashing machine at the moment."

Tony frowned and sat up, taking his feet off the table. His sudden change in posture and expression caught everyone's attention. "Whhhhhyyyy is Bruce like that, Lokes? Did you pull some shit on him?"

There was a bitter laugh from the other end of the call before the god responded. "You think I *want* to deal with the green beast again?"

Tony could hear a very stressed out voice nearby say, "Shut up Loki, calling him a beast is *not exactly helping right now!*"

Tony snickered and leaned back in his chair again. "So what's eating Gilbert Grape then? Why did you call me and not..." He trailed off and glanced at the others, thinking,

Use the Mind Link.

"...Uh, call your brother or something," he amended lamely.

"Your friend here was already calling you when about thirty SHIELD soldiers burst in and surrounded us," Loki said, his voice sounding irate. "He handed me this device in a panic and is currently sitting down doing something that looks like breathing exercises."

Tony glanced at his phone before putting it back to his ear and saying, "Hold on, let me ask Daddy why he has you grounded. Call you back?"

Loki muttered something along the lines of, "Do what you want," and hung up clumsily.

Stark looked at his phone for a long moment before looking at Director Fury.

"So, Captain Hook, mind telling me why my house is full of SHIELD agents right now? I'm warning you now, you're paying for any damages. Oh, and for anything the Hulk breaks when he freaks out."

All their eyes were on Fury. Steve looked worried while the other two looked strangely angry. The Director cast his glare at all of them before turning around to speak to the window behind him. "I wanted to test something with Loki and yourself. You two have acted a little weird since you came back. Banner was not supposed to be involved."

Tony gritted his teeth and glanced back at his phone before thinking to Loki, "*Hey Lokes. I think Mr. Fury here has noticed our little private conversations. This whole thing*

stinks like a lab test. What do you want to do? I personally don't want to be stuck in a cell with SHIELD assholes poking and prodding me."

He felt the humor in Loki's voice as it filled his mind,

"I do not find that prospect any more appealing than you do, Anthony. Proceed as you see fit and I will follow your lead... unless one of these mortals decides to start something."

Tony chuckled quietly before he realized that he was doing it out loud. Fury whipped around quickly and stared at him.

Tony flashed another grin and wriggled his eyebrows at the others before flipping open his phone again. "Hi *Honey*," he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "So apparently this is a little test by our very own Director here. The California Raisin seems to think there's something funky going on between us and felt that the best way to handle it was to break into my home and attack you. You know, instead of *asking* me what was going on."

Everyone around the table heard the burst of laughter from the other end of the line. Tony stood up, ignoring an unsatisfied grunt from Fury, and nodded to the two spies. He paused long enough to wink at Steve before starting to walk out.

"Should we kill one of them?" Tony said, as loud as possible. "I mean they *are* trespassing. You don't think it's a good idea? I think it's a great idea. We can hang one upside down and cut him... No no. In the bathroom. Tile is *SO* much easier to clean..." He continued on until he was out of earshot.

The Captain watched him leave with a look of sheer horror. He cleared his throat and turned to the Director. "Uh, Director Fury, I don't know what you were trying to do there, but I think you proved that Tony can murder someone and hide the body without us ever knowing."

Clint let out a short laugh and said, "That, or he will put someone's head in our bed."

Fury ignored both of them, looking down at his communicator to push a button. Steve glanced nervously at the other two, asking with his eyes what to do. Natasha flicked her eyes to the door and Clint did a shooing action under the table. Rogers stood up awkwardly and ran out after Tony.

Once out of ear shot, Tony hung up the phone and continued on through the mind link.

"I'm coming back now, Lokes. Has he called them off yet?"

Loki's voice sounded faintly amused.

"They just spoke to someone and seem to be leaving now. Your friend also calmed down considerably once I explained the reasoning for this. He seems to have thought they were here for him."

Tony sensed a hint of sympathy in the god's voice and smiled. He was about to respond when the Captain's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Stark, wait up a moment," Steve said as he ran to catch up, then paused a moment to take a breath. "I don't know what actually is going on between Loki and you..."

Tony opened his mouth to say something but stopped as Steve put a hand up.

"I don't really care right now," he said. "You two aren't actually hurting anyone. I just want to warn you, Director Fury is up to something else. Be careful on your way out, alright?"

Tony smirked and saluted him sarcastically. "Will do. Thanks for the warning, Captain!"

Steve gave him a look of disappointment before turning back to the meeting room. As he turned the corner, a few agents rushed passed him, heading in Stark's Direction. Steve felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up. He felt something bad was going to happen.

While he rushed back towards Tony and the agents he could hear the snarky sound of Tony's voice. He turned the corner just in time to see one of the agents taser Stark in the back of his neck. The two agents caught Tony as he fell and started to haul his body towards Steve. Ducking into a door on his right, Steve closed it gently and remained silent as they passed. After a few moments he took out his phone and looked at it.

He still hadn't gotten the hang of the device yet and he wasn't yet sure if he even wanted to get in the middle of this. He stared at the phone a moment longer before flipping it open and finding his contacts list.

Loki was stretched out across the arm chair with his legs dangling over the side. He had sat like this since the agents burst into the room, and had stayed there long after they left. Loki was still looking at Bruce's phone when it rang yet again. He glanced over at the scientist who shrugged and gestured for him to answer it. Loki looked back at the phone and answered, "Yes?"

He was expecting Stark's voice, but was surprised to hear that it was the Captain calling. "Loki? Why are you still answering Banner's phone? Is he alright?"

Loki felt a sneer settle into place automatically. "He's fine," he drawled. "What do you want, Captain?"

There was a long pause before Steve spoke again, his voice filled with concern. "I don't know what's going on, and I want to stay out of it as much as possible. But Fury has crossed a line and attacked our own. That makes it my business. "

Loki's heartbeat quickened at his words. "What in Óðins heiti is going on?"

Steve let out a breath, saying quickly, "Two agents just knocked Stark out and carried him off. I don't know what's going on yet, but I'm gonna' find out. I don't want you to make any moves on this yet. It's obviously some sort of trap or test for you. You do anything, it's playing right into Fury's hands."

There was a long silence before Loki spoke again. Steve could almost feel the chill crawl through the phone.

"My thanks for your...*concern*, but I always do what I want. Fury has something that is mine, I will be taking it back now."

"The casket?! *No!* You can't take that back now. He will just see it as an attack!"

There was a chuckle from Loki. "I didn't mean the *casket*."

The call ended suddenly, leaving Rogers looking confused.

No, not sleep.

I've avoided you for so long, where did you come from, you bastard?

Tony felt restrained in the darkness, and his pulse quickened with the usual fear. For the past week, as soon as he closed his eyes at night, the darkness crawled close with a rustle. This time he couldn't escape, and his body refused to wake up.

I'm trapped.

I'm trapped with the thing.

He clawed his way through the dark, whimpering. He needed something, someone, anyone to save him.

I've got to try harder to wake up.

He forced his eyes to open with every ounce of strength left in his body.

The room was dim and he could just make out a form of someone in white standing over him. The figure leaned closer and said, "You're not supposed to be awake yet."

Tony tried to speak, to beg the man not to let him sleep. He whimpered as the darkness washed over him again.

Directory Fury was actually feeling a little bad. He watched the other room on the monitor as Stark forced himself awake, only to be put to sleep again by the doctor. Fury had no fight with Stark. As much of an annoying asshole as he was, the guy had been through hell and back, and still ended up doing the right thing. Mostly.

Fury kept watching the screen thoughtfully even as the room started to grow colder. His forehead furrowed and he glanced at the agent next to him, noticing that the man had frozen solid, as if time had stopped. Taking only a second to register this, Fury spun around, his gun ready and aimed at Loki's face.

The calm mask that had graced the god's face during their last meeting was gone. There was nothing but pure hatred radiating from every part of the god's body. The room grew even colder as Loki stepped forward, Fury watching him carefully with his one eye, waiting for him to make the first move.

"What are you doing in here Loki? This isn't a good way to make us trust you," he said quietly.

Loki smiled slowly, like a cat. "As *you* have already proved to be untrustworthy, I feel that my actions are fair. Now tell me what you want before the next minute is up, or your agent," he said, gesturing towards the frozen man, "will run out of air."

Loki had never felt so angry. The only thing that ever came close was his uncontrollable madness when he was lost under Thanos. This time he felt a rage that belonged only to him. He was more aware and in control this time.

This made him a hundred times more dangerous.

He watched Fury's face run through tactics, thinking behind his small gun. His body never trembled or showed any sign of fear, but Loki could smell it.

"I want to try our machine on you. It would only be temporary, but I want to remove your magic." Fury spoke calmly, as though to keep Loki from getting angrier. "We tried it a few months back on Thor's hammer, and it worked for a day or so. The power eventually sucked itself right back out of the machine and into the hammer again. I'm assuming it will do the same for you. We just need to know that it works, for the future."

Loki scoffed and stepped closer, flicking a wrist at the agent next to the computer. The young man gasped for air and looked around, confused. There was a puff of smoke around him in the moment before he disappeared. Fury grunted in anger and stepped closer with his gun.

"What did you do to him?" he demanded, as Loki leaned closer to the monitors. Loki found Stark's screen and watched him with a small frown on his face.

"You made him sleep..."

"What. Did. You. Do. To. Him?" Fury growled.

Loki shrugged and faced the Director. "I sent him to another room. There was no reason to keep him here."

"Don't you need some sort of collateral?"

"This *entire* complex is my collateral, Mr. Fury. Now tell me again, why was it necessary to kidnap and hurt one of your own precious Avengers?" Loki's voice dropped into a hiss as he stepped even closer, the gun inches away from his face.

Fury frowned and dropped his gun before he spoke. "You two have some sort of a connection. It's like you're talking in your damn minds or something. I wanted to test it out or at least catch you two while you did it."

He sighed at looked at the screens again. "There are things we need to keep secret here. I need to know if you have the ability to snoop around in our heads."

Loki was silent for a moment before muttering something. A moment later Fury felt a pressure in his head as Loki's voice spoke inside of it.

"I can do many things with mortal minds. I do not 'snoop', seeing as humans tend to leave more open and obvious trails of information. I already knew of your 'secret' plans without ever touching your brain."

Fury's eye narrowed, trying to force him out of his head with sheer stubborn will.

Loki chuckled and spoke out loud. "I do not enjoy the experience, for it is a painful one to enter someone's mind against their will. With Anthony, it's a different story." He turned to look at the monitor again.

He muttered softly, more to himself than to Fury. "It will hurt. Removing my magic..."

The Director glanced over at him and smiled. "Honestly? A lot of people here *need* to see that. There's gonna' be a crowd after what you did to agent Coulson."

Loki visibly flinched, causing Fury's trigger finger to twitch slightly. The god stared at the screens, lost in thought.

"I understand your conditions," Loki said quietly. "May I go pick up what is mine now?"

Fury's eyebrow went up again at the wording. "Sure, go take the playboy home. Be back here tomorrow with everyone. I want all of the Avengers present for this."

Loki nodded and looked into the Director's one good eye before disappearing. The temperature

rose immediately after his departure. Fury quickly looked at the screen with Stark and turned up the volume.

Loki appeared in the room and sat carefully on the edge of the cot. Gently placing a hand on Stark's chest, he reached out into the mortal's mind to search for any sign of his presence.

"Anthony, can you hear me? I'm going to try to wake you now..."

He heard a faint whimper echo from somewhere deep in Tony's mind. Loki sent a small burst of magic into Stark's body to wake him up. The mortal's eyes snapped open and widened as he stared at the white ceiling above him. Sitting up quickly, Tony looked around the room in a panic before his eyes focused on the god next to him.

"Oh for fuck's sake!" Stark exclaimed, leaning forward and resting his forehead on Loki's shoulder. "Oh fuck, thank *god*... literally."

Loki chuckled and wrapped his arms around Tony to comfort him as best as he could. He knew there was no comfort strong enough to dispel the filthy feeling one got after dealing with that thing. The man was trembling again, his hands clutching at the god's clothes.

"It's alright now, Anthony," Loki said before lowering his voice. "But we shouldn't speak out loud about it."

He leaned back and smiled at him reassuringly before flicking his eyes toward the corner of the room. Tony frowned and glanced up to see a small camera. He spared a moment to flip the bird to whoever was watching before looking back at Loki.

"I can't sleep anymore, Lokes. It's always there. Whether it's a memory or not, it makes it impossible to sleep," Tony thought, his voice softening near the end. *"I don't know how you do it."*

Loki forced a weak smile, his fingers running gentle circles on Tony's back.

"It took a long while for me to sleep again after I left the void. Why do you think Thanos was able to get inside my mind so easily? I had no peace while I was adrift."

Tony looked more afraid at hearing that. Loki touched his arm and smiled with more meaning. *"I will help you sleep, Anthony. For now, let us go home."*

Tony felt his face go red as the god called his penthouse 'home'. He grinned nervously and pushed back from Loki to swing his feet over the edge of the bed. Tony stopped himself and glanced at the camera.

"Wait, are we sneaking out of here?" he asked, looking at the door with curiosity. "I was kind of expecting a bunch of angry guys to come busting in any moment now."

"I spoke to Fury," Loki said in a flat, emotionless voice. "I will return here tomorrow as a part of a bargain."

Tony stiffened as he whipped his head around to look at Loki. His eyes sparkled with anger. "I don't*think* so," was all he said before he stood up.

Loki stood and touched the mortal's arm again gently. "Anthony," he said. "I will explain it all when we return home. Come closer so we may go." Loki's voice was soft, nearly pleading. Tony

started to worry more at the tone of Loki's voice. His stomach full of dread, he turned his body into the god's, and wrapped his arms around him tightly.

Fury is watching this, that little creep.

He decided to give Fury one last bit of showmanship and glanced up at the camera. Keeping his eyes fixed on that corner, Tony ran his tongue along Loki's neck before biting it gently. The next second they were gone.

Back in the monitor room Fury leant back in his chair, one eyebrow arched.

"Jesus Christ, Stark."

Tony hit the floor rather hard when they arrived in his living room. With a groan, he and sat up and said, "Déjà vu. I think we've done this before, Lokes."

Laughing, he ran his hands over his face. When Loki said nothing, Tony looked over at where the god was sitting. Loki was frozen, staring at Tony with a blank look and pink tinted cheeks. Tony blinked at him in silence before it dawned on him that Fury wasn't the only one affected by his little act.

Oh Christ. Oh shit.

I can't believe I just DID that!

He blushed and then panicked, and then blushed some more. Tony decided to risk death and crawled over to the god.

"Oh man, Lokes, *I'm sorry*," he said, looking into the god's eyes with worry. "I shouldn't have done that. At least, I should have asked first. I won't do it..." "

A voice spoke up from behind him, causing both of Tony and the god to jump.

"What did you do this time, Tony?"

There was a collective laugh from several people when Tony turned around. Spread out across Tony's expensive furniture was the entire Avengers team.

Well great, everyone is here to watch my precious moment with Loki.

"He did nothing wrong," Loki said suddenly, interrupting everyone's laughter. There were a few raised eyebrows and a snort of disbelief from Clint. "He simply angered Director Fury once more before we left."

Tony turned to direct a silent question at Loki. The god smiled slowly and winked in response.

"What the fuck?!" Tony thought *"Did you just—?!"*

"Nothing wrong?" Clint asked. "Then why is he apologizing to you like he cheated on you or something?" Natasha smacked him on the back of the head to shut him up.

Steve glanced at the archer before turning back to the two still sitting on the floor. "We've got more important things going on than this. Stark, are you alright? They zapped you pretty good back

there." Rogers leaned forward on the couch to get a better look at him. Tony blinked a few times before he caught up with what was going on.

He reached and touched the back of his neck, flinching as his fingers touched the burn. "Those fuckers, I should have got their names."

Loki tsked and gently placed a cool finger on the back of Stark's neck. Little sparks of green snapped and glittered before sinking into the burnt skin. Tony felt his cheeks blush against his will as everyone in the room watched. Natasha gave him a knowing look that sent him scooting to get away from the god. He stood up, ignoring the fact that he swayed as he moved, and hobbled over to the left over armchair before throwing himself into it.

Tony's exhausted face changed suddenly, his features hardening. Tony turned to Loki and said in a cold, angry voice, "You have some explaining to do, Loki. What did you give Fury to get me out?"

"I'm sorry Stark," Steve interrupted. "But could we start with what Director Fury was talking about at the meeting? What was he 'testing' between you two?"

Loki stood and dusted himself off with careful, precise movements. He looked around the room before a small smile settled on his face.

"Anthony and I speak through our minds," he said, ignoring Stark's surprised grunt. "It is something that we discovered on the planet we were stranded on before returning here." Loki's smile wavered slightly. "It is more complicated than that, but I'm afraid that is all I am willing to say on the matter."

Bruce raised his hand a little before asking, "Is this just something between you two, or can you talk to everyone using your mind?" He paused, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. "Actually, the more important question is: does this mean you can read *our* minds?"

Loki chuckled, causing Bruce to smile sheepishly. "Yes and *no*. It is easiest to speak with Anthony in comparison to others due to... certain aspects. I do not wish to *ever* 'read your minds'. It can be a painful experience for me to attempt to enter another's mind when one is unwelcome there. I have no wish to see your thoughts," Loki said. His eyes flicked to Stark before continuing, "I would however, like to offer you the ability to speak to me this way."

Everyone shifted in their seats, looking uneasy. Loki ignored their discomfort and continued on, "If there were ever a situation where communication was unavailable, I offer you this opportunity. We would have to make a connection now to establish a link. It would be a weak connection, and would take a lot more effort to connect than with Stark, but I feel that in an emergency it could be quite useful."

The group glanced at each other thoughtfully. Oddly enough, Clint was the first one to speak. "I'll do it. Let's make a connection."

Steve asked in surprise, "You, of all people? You either are all guts, or no brains." He chuckled at the face Clint made in response. Clint turned to Loki again, his expression expectant. The god mumbled something softly before pushing a thought into the agent's mind.

"Respond to me carefully."

Clint's expression went serious as he seemed to be trying hard to think back. Tony let out a laugh, covering his mouth when Natasha glared at him. He then secretly took out his phone and snapped a

picture of Clint's constipated look. The archer continued to look strained until Loki suddenly laughed. Opening his eyes, Clint gave Steve a smug look and a thumbs up to the rest of the group before leaning back to relax.

Natasha sighed and readied herself, sitting up straight and looking directly into the god's eyes. Loki began gently, but eventually had to force his way into the red-head's mind. She gave a lot more resistance than Clint, causing him to grumble audibly. However, it wasn't long before she also smiled with success and leaned over to whisper into Barton's ear, causing the man to blush a little. Loki paused at Steve, as though unsure whether to proceed.

Rogers returned his look, then sighed in a resigned manner. "I don't really want you in my head, but I don't want to be the odd one out if something does happen and we can't communicate. Let's get this over and done with," he said before leaning his elbows on his knees and looking down. Loki smirked and pushed a little harder than necessary to the soldier. The Captain startled and looked up at Loki with a bemused expression.

"You can... *do* that?" he asked out loud. Loki shook a finger at him, and then pointed to his own forehead. Steve concentrated for a long while before Loki gave the nod of approval.

Turning to Bruce at last, Loki smiled. "Dr. Banner, might I suggest you move away from everyone else?" he asked. "Just as precaution, in case my meddling causes the more angry part of you to react."

Bruce smiled sadly and removed himself from the couch to stand away from everyone. The god's face was gentle as he probed the man's mind as carefully as he could. As soon as he breached the barrier he was met with chaos. Loki's eyes grew wide as his mind was twisted around inside the crashing waves of Bruce's thoughts. Loki felt for the eye of the storm and, entering it, found the human form of Bruce sitting there alone. He spoke to him quietly and left his mind as fast as possible. Bruce sent a careful thought back that seemed to take a long while to reach Loki. The god stepped back and away from the man, his face paler than before.

"Góður Gods ofan okkur öll..." he said, his eyebrows drawing together in concern. "Is that what your mind is like *all* of the time?"

Bruce let out an exhausted laugh as he sat back down on the couch. "Yep. Every minute of everyday. Frightening isn't it?"

Loki smiled weakly and nodded, glancing back at Tony who was eyeing Bruce with a worried look. Stark turned his attention back to Loki and narrowed his eyes before saying quietly, "Now that the party tricks are done, can we move on to the part where you go into SHIELD tomorrow to become Fury's bitch or something?"

Loki stood tall in front of the mortal and refused to look away from Stark as he began to speak. "I went there to speak about the mind link and to inquire as to why he was attacking you, Anthony," he said. "He made a deal with me that requires I return tomorrow with all of you."

Thor, from his usual spot by the door, asked, "What is it they wish you to do, brother?"

Refusing to look away from Tony's eyes, Loki responded, "They are going to take away my magic."

"Good Gods above us all...Is that what your mind is like all of the time?"

Oh Bruce... poor bruce.

You Can't Take That Away From Me

Chapter Summary

In which things go as poorly as expected. As they say, no honor among thieves.

Chapter Notes

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

[Disclaimer: I do not, in anyway, own these characters. All rights belong to Marvel etc.]

You Can't Take That Away

From Me.

(Ch 10)

Tony had an hour-long fit that included blowing out two more windows before Loki managed to grab him. They vanished from the room. While the two of them were gone, the team came to an agreement about the situation. Clint proclaimed that the deal was bullshit and unfair by all standards. Natasha commented dryly that Stark might just kill Fury over this. Steve voiced his concern that Loki and Stark had something weird going on between them other than the mind link. Bruce muttered something nasty about "lab rats," and focused on his breathing exercises.

Loki and Tony reappeared down in the training room with a soft, metallic pop. Tony frowned and tried to calm his breathing down before he took his anger out on the only person there. He wanted to yell at Loki for being stupid, for saving him, for everything. Anger rose in him again before arms suddenly wrapped around him from behind.

"Wha...? Lokes? Are you trying to restrain me?" he asked, with a hint of sarcasm. Loki chuckled softly and pressed his face into the back of Stark's neck.

"Perhaps," he muttered into Tony's back, pressing his face into his shirt. "Anthony, I do not feel like replacing all of your windows before I lose my magic."

Tony smiled and touched the god's arms. "I don't think I've ever been comforted by the person I'm pissed-off at." He paused, then whispered, "Loki... I don't want you to do this because of me. I don't want you to do it at *all*. I don't like sacrifices. I've had way too many people pull that shit with me. "

Tony turned around to look at the god before Loki could respond. Loki stared back in surprise at Stark's expression of sadness.

He truly cares about me, not just for honor or duty. Not some misplaced beliefs.

It is just me.

Tony's attention was immediately drawn to the god's mouth. He was trying not to think about the way Loki's tongue was licking his lower lip while he thought.

*If he doesn't stop staring at me like that I'm going to kiss him until he pushes me away.
I give him five seconds.*

Tony watched the god's mouth for another two seconds before pressing his lips against Loki's firmly. Tony half expected the god to push him away immediately, and was half-preparing a joke to cover his ass. When Loki, instead, ran his fingers through Stark's hair and pulled him closer, he lost all train of thought. His hands found their way up Loki's back as the kiss was mutually deepened. The god's long fingers dragged through Stark's hair until they were cupping his face. Tony felt his brain running out of air and cursed himself for being human for the hundredth time in his life.

If I break this kiss, he's going to run away and pretend it didn't happen. That stick will grow right back up his ass.

He held out a minute more before he pulled his head back, gasping for air.

Loki felt the mortal struggling mentally and physically to stay connected to him. He nearly laughed at Stark's efforts to keep up with the kiss. When Stark finally gave in and broke the kiss, Loki was startled that Tony met his eyes fearlessly.

"That was *unexpected*, but enjoyable," Loki said with a hint of a smile.

Tony chuckled and reached up to run his fingers through the god's hair.

"Can I tell you a secret?" he asked, his eyes still glazed over from the kiss.

Loki tilted his head into Tony's hand as he stroked his hair. "You may."

"I've always secretly wanted to touch your hair, but I was afraid you would have bear traps in it."

Loki let out a quiet huff of laughter before leaning his forehead against Tony's. "We just did something very dangerous and life changing and you want to crack jokes about my hair. How very *you*."

"Hey, did you expect anything different?"

"Not at all."

Tony snorted and removed his head from Loki's to hide it in the god's chest. "I'm trying to not freak out because you have yet to skin me and use my flesh as a cape. I need to mentally prepare myself for kissing-Loki punishment. Speaking of," he said, glancing up and raising an eyebrow, "Why haven't you done anything yet?"

Loki made a face and slipped his hands under the back of Tony's shirt. Tony shivered.

"I know I may be ruthless to those I dislike..." Loki started. Tony coughed. Ignoring it, Loki continued, "But I am honest about my feelings when I know what I want." Loki leaned closer and purred, "And I want you. "

Tony tried not to show how much those words effected him. He failed miserably. His lips captured Loki's again roughly and the continued where they left off.

Upstairs, the team started to get impatient. Steve had managed to fall asleep with his head leaning back on the couch. His soft snores filled the room. Agent Barton made use of his spy training and had taken the liberty of drawing all over Steve's face with a marker. Natasha took over the armchair and sat in it as though it were a throne. Bruce kept himself entertained by watching Thor, who, while humming an old tune from Asgard, shot tiny sparks of lightning out the broken window. They were taken by surprise when the two missing members showed up again in the middle of the living room. Thor stopped shooting lightning and eyed his brother and Stark carefully, noting their slightly flushed cheeks. He wondered if it had been cold wherever the two of them had been. Throwing himself back onto the couch, Thor startled Steve awake. As the soldier tilted his head up, blinking groggily, Tony spotted his face.

He pointed dramatically and made a harsh screeching noise before bursting out laughing. Clint rolled his eyes and tucked the marker away. "Really?" asked Clint. "Where did that reference even come from?"

Tony was bent over laughing, barely able to respond. "Oh... come on. Pod People is perfect for any situation. Besides, you're one to talk. "

Steve stared at them, still half asleep, and raised a hand to his face to rub at it. The captain's expression when he saw the ink smudged on his hand caused a few snickers around the room. With an inhuman speed, Tony whipped his phone out and snapped a picture. Before Steve exploded in anger, Thor took him off to find a bathroom.

After Tony finally managed to catch his breath, Clint asked, "So are you two done flipping out and having makeup sex?"

Loki narrowed his eyes and said nothing. Tony looked thoughtful. "We didn't have enough time for the second part. Maybe if you all left..."

Bruce made a choking sound and hid his face as he laughed. Agent Romanoff remained expressionless and stood, stretching before heading toward the door. She patted Tony on the shoulder as she passed, stopping to say, "Stark, I want you to know that we are all agree that Fury is in the wrong on this one. I know it's only temporary, but removing his magic was never a part of

the deal."

"Yeah, about that," Tony said, leaning closer and keeping his voice low. "You mind telling me what Fury was doing in California? He showed up way too fast when we magicked our way back to earth."

Natasha glanced at the god before muttering to Tony, "He's been on this coast since we started tracking magic patterns. The complex here is the only one equipped with the labs and technology to test it. He had Thor in with his hammer a few months ago, and I'm sure Loki's casket is being tested as we speak."

"Grand. I love how SHIELD seems to be following me around every time I build in a new city."

The red head laughed in a cat-like manner before giving Tony's shoulder another squeeze and leaving. Both Tony and Loki looked exhausted and ready to sleep where they stood. They said their goodbyes to the remaining Avengers as the group headed out to gather the pissed off Rogers. The god and mortal glanced at one another before they both collapsed ungracefully into the couch. The house filled with silence as they both leaned against one another.

Tony spoke first. "Don't go tomorrow. Just don't. Fury can't touch us here, not if I take him seriously."

"So you weren't taking him seriously before?" Loki asked, his voice softening as he nuzzled his face into Tony's hair. "Anthony, I have no desire to do this either, but I swore I would. I do not go back on my word and I do not often make promises. This was the bargain to take you home without a fight."

Tony sighed and found himself drifting off to the sound of the god's heartbeat. "I'll be there for you the entire time... Just...don't get lost again, Lokes," he managed to say before his eyes finally shut.

"Stop calling me Lokes..."

Both were asleep before Thor peeked in to check on them. He beamed happily at the two of them sleeping on the couch together and snuck off as quietly as he could.

Tony stared out the window of the black SHIELD car as they drove to the complex. He had long since been able to hide his emotions behind a cocky expression no matter what the situation, and today would be no different.

Except it is.

I can't fucking smile or crack a joke.

Loki broke me, dammit.

I don't do feelings.

There was a gentle touch on the back of his clenched fist. Tony glanced up, his eyes meeting Loki's. A quiet mental voice reached him, saying,

"Anthony... you're hurting your hands, clenching them like that."

Tony looked down at his hands and saw that his short nails had somehow managed to dig into the

skin. He smiled bitterly and thought back, *"It doesn't matter, Lokes. More importantly, why all the ceremony? We could have just popped into the room."*

"I believe Fury said something about SHEILD agents needing to see this. This *is* a ceremony, of sorts." He slipped his hand into Stark's.

Tony's eyebrows drew together in anger as he squeezed the god's hand gently, muttering, "It's an execution."

They sat in silence for the rest of the journey. Once there, a long glance passed between them before they let go of each other's hands. Loki stepped out of the car and was soon followed by the Avengers team from the other cars. No one spoke as the guards stepped up nervously, unsure whether they should be escorting the god as a prisoner, or treating him as a guest. A single glare from Natasha sent all of them away. The halls of the base were lined with agents and scientists, each leaning to get a better view of Loki. The building was filled with a buzz of chatter and excited energy.

The designated room was large and circular, surrounded by the hall. Each area of the hall had reinforced windows looking into the room. The glass looked as though tanks couldn't break through it. Tony thought to himself bitterly,

Just like Loki's cell. Well, Hulk's cell originally.

I guess they stuck with the same architect.

As they reached the door to the room, Nick Fury came out and stood, holding it open for Loki. Tony looked the Director in the eye and smiled slowly, his eyes glittering with hateful promises. Before the god stepped into the room, Thor came forward and hugged his brother tightly. He muttered softly in Loki's ear before letting him go and stepping back.

Loki remained solemn but sent one last thought to all of the Avengers,

"You all have my thanks for your support and kind feelings on the matter."

He turned away without meeting Tony's eye and walked into the room. The door shut behind Loki, leaving Fury outside with the rest of them. Inside the room were several scientists in full white suits and goggles. None of them approached the god, but one asked almost kindly for him to step onto a platform towards the center of the room. When he did, all eyes moved to the machine that faced him from across the room. It was a strange combination of wires and glass, hooked up to something that look all too similar to a vacuum cleaner. It seemed to run on its own power source, a fact which caused Tony to glance at Bruce and raise an eyebrow.

"Did you have a hand in that?" he asked. "Cuz there's no way Raisin's men could have pulled that tech out of their collective asses."

"Stark," Fury said without removing his eyes from the glass in front of him. "I will shoot you if you use that nickname again."

Tony turned his head slowly to looked at him, snarling, " *Director*, I will shoot you for *existing* today." He turned back around to face a frowning Bruce.

"I did have a hand in it, Tony," the doctor said, his hands fidgeting. "I'm sorry, but it was before we knew everything that had happened. To us, you got kidnapped by a crazy god and were

probably already dead. So yes, I helped them build something that could potentially remove the magic from the user. "

Stark's smile came out more like a grimace. "Hey, I would have done it too," he said, patting his friend's back. "If it were any of you, I would be all over Loki's magic ass." He blinked when his mind caught up with his mouth. Tony shrugged it off before gritting his teeth and watching silently through the glass.

Loki had stripped down to some sort of loose undershirt and his usual leather pants. If this had been any other situation, Tony would have been completely turned on by those excessively tight pants. There was a lot of chatter from the SHEILD members gathering to watch.

*Here they are, acting like this is justice. They're just here for blood.
No better than Loki as Thanos' bitch.*

Loki glanced once more out at the crowd gathered around the room. He found Tony instantly and felt a smile tug at his lips. He stopped himself from it, knowing that he needed to put on a show of remorse.

*The criminal going to the gallows.
I need to look guilty.*

One of the scientists waved at Loki and said, "It's time. You will need to hold as still as possible and this is probably going to hurt. Are you ready?"

There was a small sort of cheer that went through the crowd at the mention of pain. Loki simply snorted and nodded. The man pushed a switch on the side and stepped back behind a clear barrier. The contraption rattled and made a high pitch whine before a ray of blue light came out and focused directly at Loki's chest.

For a moment, everyone assumed that the machine had failed. Loki turned his head to look at Tony, afraid to even dare that it could be true. A second later he felt something tear into his soul.

Tony flinched when the light hit Loki's chest. He held his breath a moment as nothing happened, and nearly sighed with relief as the god glanced his way. Suddenly, the machine made a hissing sound and the color drained from Loki's face. The god looked so shocked, it was almost comical. Loki reached a hand up to clutch at his chest and Tony stepped forward to press against the glass. There was a moment of silence before the god's mouth opened and let out an agonizing scream. His hands clutched his chest desperately as more raw screams tore through the room.

Tony clutched the rim of the window, unable to tear his eyes away from the god. "TURN IT OFF! TURN IT THE FUCK OFF!" he shouted through the glass.

Thor jumped towards the door of the room and pressed the handle to gain entrance. Seeing the number lock on the side he turned to Fury and growled, "Director, open this door before I tear it down."

Fury frowned and shook his head. "You were all warned that it might hurt him. If you interrupt it now, we don't know what it could do to him. It could very well kill him."

Tony failed to hear the exchange, his ears filled only with Loki's screams. When the god suddenly fell to his knees, Tony felt a sharp pain rip through his own body.

"Nnaauugh!?"

Tony fell forward clutching at his chest in pain and confusion. Bruce tried to help him up, looking over at Thor for answers. "Thor! What is going on?!" he attempted to yell over Loki's continuous screams. Thor looked at Tony then at his screaming brother. The color drained from his face.

"Director, you *must* stop this or you may kill Loki and Tony both," he said, his expression fearful.

Fury glanced down at Stark and was about to speak when Tony suddenly screamed loudly. Clint and Natasha rushed over and tried to help Tony off the floor as Thor turned away from all of them and lifted his hammer. Fury tried and failed to grab Thor's arm.

The door flew into the circular room with one hit. The moment it was gone, Tony was off the floor and running awkwardly into the room. He stumbled and fell before he could reach the machine, another groan of pain escaping him. Loki's pain-filled eyes lowered from the ceiling and found Stark crumpled on the floor near by. His own screams stuttered to a stop as an expression of fear crossed his face. The god started to crawl off the platform, when something ripped free of his body with a sickening crunch.

His magic tore from his body, leaving a gaping hole in his soul. His face contorted in a silent, breathless scream before the machine came to a halt. After a quiet pause, a cheerful chime filled the room as the machine started to print out readings.

Loki's green eyes slowly dulled to a gray. His skin flickered blue once before becoming the sickly pale color of the dead. The god looked down at his hands silently while everyone filed into the room. Steve and Clint were trying to get Stark to uncurl from the fetal position he had assumed since the magic left Loki's body. Thor was at his brother's shoulder, trying to speak to him.

"*Brother!* Brother, are you alright?!" he said urgently into Loki's ear.

Loki turned slowly and looked at his brother as if unsure of who he was. He stood carefully with help from Thor and looked over at Tony's crumpled body.

"Anthony," he asked the still form on the floor. "Are we dead?"

Everyone's eyes followed Loki as he walked over to the curled-up mortal. Falling to his knees beside him, he touched the man's back gently. A small whimper came from Tony before his head came up. A shock went through the room at the sight of him.

His usually rosy skin was a match for Loki's nasty gray color, the flesh under his eyes darker than ever. Tony's eyes were no longer a clear brown but a dark gray, nearly black. Bruce visibly flinched back at the sight of his friend. Loki pressed past the scientist and helped Stark up from the floor, both of them leaning on the other for support.

Fury's voice broke the silence. "Will someone tell me *what the fuck* is going on?"

"I know what it is," Thor said, his voice unnaturally calm. "But I shan't explain it until we return my brother's magic from that mechanism."

A thin voice startled them. "This has not been my week, month...year, I guess." Tony said, looking over at the machine.

Steve stepped forward and offered an arm to help him. "How are you feeling?" he asked nervously.

Tony accepted the offered arm, stumbling toward the device. "I feel a little dead... *again*," he said.

Loki followed them over to the machine, looking very much like a lost puppy. Tony looked back at him and automatically tried to think calming thoughts to him. A pain shot through his head, knocking him off his feet.

It was a while before he could hear what anyone was saying again.

"What? Stop *yelling* at me," he groaned. Those around him looked down at him with concern.

"What did I miss?" he asked groggily, sitting up. The situation had changed since his blackout. Fury was speaking to Thor over to one side. A few scientists were removing a glass dome from the back of the machine with Bruce ordering them around in an abrupt, angry manner. Tony stood with the help of Clint and Steve again and hobbled back over to the machine.

"You taking out the power source?" he asked, leaning a little on Steve.

Bruce looked up sharply, his expression softening at the sight of his friend. "That's where we think Loki's magic is stored. The thing is," he said, frowning and looked down at the glowing core, "We never did figure out where it stayed in the machine. It never went to the designated place."

Tony leaned over and looked at the core, a familiar feeling stirring in his chest.

"*Oh...*"

Bruce's eyebrows went up with concern, "What's wrong?"

Tony stared at the blue glowing core, so similar to his own.

It was Loki.

The feeling of Loki.

He reached in and touched it gently, It felt cold under his hand.

"That's it. It's in there."

One of the scientist removed the core and attempted to hand it over to Stark.

Tony looked at the man, exasperated. "I don't like things handed to me..."

"What?"

"I don't like things..." He stopped and glared. "Look, just put it on the table and go away already." Tony glared at the man as he placed the core down. He snatched it up quickly and rushed over to the crumpled form of Loki by the doorway. Before he could reach the god, a loud, wet thunk came from the corner of the room. Everyone's attention was immediately drawn to where Thor and Director Fury had been talking. Thor stood, towering over the man, his hammer in hand. Fury was on the floor several feet away holding his jaw with a look of utter shock.

Thor's voice shook the room as he spoke. "I have had enough!" he bellowed. "We may have come here and played by your rules, but you seem to have *forgotten* that we are immortals. My brother

and I have lived far longer lives than any of you, and we shall continue to live long after you have passed."

Tony's heart skipped a beat at the thought before Thor continued to speak.

"You seem to have also forgotten that not long ago, we were considered your gods," he said, his voice rising. "I do not expect you to revere us as mortals once did, but I *do expect some respect*. We made a deal with you, and you went back on your word. I remind you, Loki is not the only one who could tear this base apart."

There was a long silence after his outburst. Steve shifted uncomfortably next to Tony. Fury looked as though he would speak before Thor put up a hand to stop him.

"You have betrayed our trust, lied to us, and nearly killed my brother. You attacked one of your own team members and nearly killed him as well. I, for one, feel that our truce between Asgard and Earth should no longer be an option." The god sighed. "But I, for one, have obligations to Asgard first and foremost. I also love this planet, and I shall never stop protecting it."

He pointed at Fury with his hammer. "I will, however, no longer be taking orders from you."

Tony laughed.

He couldn't help it, he felt dead and icky and Thor had just smashed Fury with his hammer and told him to suck it. It was funny, so he was going to laugh.

When he finally stopped he watched Fury stand up, still holding his jaw. Tony cleared his throat loudly to get the man's attention. When Fury turned, Tony said with a smile, "I think I'll withdraw my funding and support for SHIELD. This means all my technology, money, and weaponry are no longer at *your* disposal. This also means I'm off the wonder team. I won't be taking any more orders from you." He shrugged. "Not that I ever really did anyway."

Fury stood his full height, his eyes flashing dangerously. "Oh, **COME ON!** All of you agreed to this! You knew he was going to have some trouble and you damn well know he deserves a little pain." The Director gestured to Loki's slumped figure. "It's fucking *temporary!* There are always gonna be risks in science. You of all people should know that, Stark!"

Tony crossed the room and was in his face in less than a second.

"The difference with me," he said, his voice venomous, "is that I put my *own* body through these tests. I know what I'm doing to myself before I do it. If I hurt myself, it's my *own* damn fault." Tony snarled and pressed closer. "The problem with *you*? You would put any one of us through a test without a second thought."

Fury swallowed and looked over at the remaining three of his team expectantly.

Bruce glared at Fury and grumbled in a not-so-calm voice, "Don't even look at me after talking about 'risks', Fury. I agree with Tony and I know damn well you would do the same to me if you weren't so *afraid* of me."

Steve simply shook his head in disappointment and joined Banner in standing next to the door. Natasha and Clint both frowned, glancing between Thor and their boss. Thor smiled at them with understanding and turned away from Fury, joining Stark and the Captain on their way to the doorway.

Clint called out, "Hang on guys. You aren't running off without me."

"I don't think so, Barton." Fury said. "You and Ms. Romanoff work directly under me. You don't get to just run off."

"I think I can. I have a right to quit if the conditions don't suit me." Clint shrugged. "Besides, I have a team to back me up."

Tony raised an eyebrow and glanced back at the archer as he ran up behind them. Clint let out a laugh as Natasha followed with her usual sober expression. As they reached the door, Tony crouched down in front of Loki and tilted the god's head up.

His usual expressionless mask was no longer a façade, it was reality. There was no emotion in his eyes, no hint of a smile behind his lips, no sign of life at all. Tony felt his already weak heart stop at the sight of him. In a rush, he shoved the glowing core into the god's hands in mad hope that he could suddenly fix everything.

Loki's eyes widened as soon as the core made contact, and he pressed it to his chest, cradling it in his hands gently. Everyone held their breath for a moment longer before the god looked at Tony. He gazed into Tony's eyes and Tony suddenly saw how helpless, fragile, and old the god looked.

Loki looked around at the people surrounding him. Speaking in a small, childlike voice, he asked,

"How do you put it back in?"

For Better or For Worse

Chapter Notes

Edited***

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

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For Better or Worse

(ch 11)

Thor sat in the living room, slumped over in a dark brooding mess. His mind was turbulent, trying to understand the events of that day.

They had left SHIELD complex together in a group, but separated outside when Stark told the others to stay in the Avengers Tower until he fixed Loki and himself up. Thor had watched them leave with worried eyes. He hadn't expected everyone to join him when he left SHIELD, and he felt responsible for the trouble they might face.

The troubled god was groaning under the burden of worry and guilt when the sound of someone entering the room made him look up. Tony stumbled in and leaned on the wall, his breath coming in short stuttering pants. Thor stood immediately to help the mortal over to the couch.

"Thanks... again. I can't shake whatever this is I've felt since it happened. Any advice on magic and shit would be extremely helpful right now," Tony said in a weak voice. "I can't seem to get his magic out of the energy core. He keeps pressing it to his chest like he can just..." Tony tapered off as he watched Thor's eyes filled with sorrow.

"I do not know how to return the magic to my brother," the god said, looking down at his fidgeting hands. "I only know that the way it was removed was very different from my father's method. I was

never in any pain like Loki has experienced. " Tears fell from Thor's down-turned face. "However, I can explain why both my brother and yourself were so badly affected."

"Yeah, that'd a good place to start."

Thor sat in silence for a moment before responding. "The connection that you have is deeper than the mental link you share. Just as Loki may speak to your friends and myself, the mind link is not necessary exclusive to one person. What you have is something much more rare. The Asgardians believed that those who share a strong mind link are what you would call 'soul mates'."

"You *told* me that already, Point Break. Loki and I are meant to be, lovers for life, etc etc."

"What I did not know at the time was that there was a deeper connection."

Tony's brow furrowed as he leaned back into the cushions, stretching his arms over his head. "I don't do relationships. This deeper connection is sounding like a mandatory thing."

"Do not worry, Tony! You always have a choice in the matter," Thor said, trying to sound chipper. "Although, I would like it if you did stay with my brother. He has never shown such a strong interest in anyone like this before." He smiled reassuringly. "Normally the connection would not be a bad thing, but the machine tore my brother apart from the inside when it stole his magic. The connection you two have is something in your souls and therefore connected to Loki's magic. In turn, you lost something as well."

Tony laughed and fell into a fit of coughing. Frowning, Thor tried to pat the mortal's back but only managed to make his coughing worse. At last, Tony calmed down enough to manage speaking again.

"Seriously? We're star-crossed lovers? Soul mates? Are you fucking *kidding* me? I don't even know if I *love* him yet," Tony said, his cheeks tinged pink.

Thor chuckled and smiled tiredly. "Tony, it is a tangible connection. You may not feel attached to him emotionally, but you felt the physical pain through the connection. Something changed when you traveled through the portal. Something awoke in my brother's magic and it is more than likely a permanent change."

Bemused, Tony looked at the god for a long moment before he stood shakily. "Well then, I'm going to go try to fix my soul mate again. Wish me luck," he said as he wobbled out of the room. Thor waved at his back sadly, turning back into a lump of stress. Outside, the sky filled with rumbling clouds.

Loki was sitting in a similar position as his older brother, the only difference being the soft green glow of the orb clutched to his chest. Tony paused a moment, eyeing the familiar scene.

"Lokes, we need to try something else," Tony said, closing the door behind him. "Preferably before Thor knocks out the entire western seaboard. "

Loki looked up at Tony with his now gray eyes. He responded in a toneless and quiet voice. "I would prefer to have it returned before you die."

"Worry about yourself first, I'm fine."

"Anthony, you are dying as we speak," Loki said, a pained expression forming on his usually passive face. "Whatever magic left over from Odin's glamour is keeping my skin from changing and my body from rotting away. You, however, have nothing to protect you." He paused and looked down at the core clutched to his chest. "You are *dying again*, and there is nothing I can do about it."

"Lokes," Tony said, stumbling closer to the god. "Not to alarm you but, I feel like I'm already dead. I'm not, right? I'll never accept it if I become a zombie. You have to kill me with a single head shot."

He pointed at Loki and then at his head to demonstrate. Loki shook his head 'no' and reached out to take Stark's hand in his own. Tony's smile faded as the god in front of him became blurry.

"I keep feeling...worse," Tony managed to croak before his body flopped forward. Loki caught him against his body and tilted the mortal's head up.

"Anthony?! T-Tony, you need to stay conscious!"

At Loki's use of his nickname, Tony smiled deliriously and slumped comfortably against the god's chest. There was a sickening metallic taste in his mouth just before a crackle filled the air. His eyes flew open in shock as the arc reactor met with the magic filled energy core. Both men shouted in pain when an explosion of light and energy threw their bodies apart. Tendrils of magic crawled under Loki's skin until they reached his chest. His dead, gray eyes sparked so bright they were almost gold. Loki could not hold back a grin as his body filled with raw power.

My magic has returned.

The smile dropped from his face when his eyes landed on Stark. The man's eyes were rolling back into his head, his body shaking and twitching dangerously. Soft whimpers escaped Tony's clenched teeth as his body continued to spasm out of control. Loki quickly reached out, his magic easily snapping from his finger tips into Tony's body.

Lightning. Power from the core was being absorbed into Anthony's reactor.

No, not magic... electricity.

The god pulled the core away from Tony's arc reactor, causing another crackle as the mortal and the mechanism disconnected. Still twitching, Tony's body slumped forward again into Loki's arms.

"... Tony?" Loki asked weakly. There was a shuddering gasp before Tony pushed himself up to look at Loki. His hair was standing on end, more than usual, and his eyes were still twitching. Loki furrowed his brow when he saw Tony's eyes were still black and lifeless. The reactor in his chest dimming ever so slightly. *He was still dying.*

A sudden surge of magic around their bodies caused glass to shatter and the walls to crack. Clutching the god's arms, Tony shouted over the chorus of shattering sounds, "Loki, take us down to the training room! Less... damage...!"

A second later, the training room filled with green waves of magic. Reaching out into the nearby work rooms, Loki's magic started to take things apart and revert them to their original state faster than Tony could follow. Tony stumbled to his knees, uncaring that his precious inventions were being manipulated by magic. Loki knelt in front of him and placed both hands on either side of

Stark's face. He grimaced, his body overwhelmed with magic and making it difficult to focus on healing. The god's face crunched with concentration as he carefully forced his healing magic into the man in front of him.

There is nothing to heal.

Loki closed his eyes and followed the pathways through Tony's mind and body. His eyes snapped open and met the worried black eyes in front of him. Fear gripped him. Jerking his hands away from Stark's temples, he stood back abruptly. With Loki's concentration broken, the waves of magic rippled out stronger than before.

Tony's eyebrows went up at the sound of glass breaking somewhere above. "So, Lokes..." he said, his voice raspy and weak. "I take it I have some incurable disease or something."

Loki snapped, fearful and angry, "That is the issue, there is nothing to cure!" He started pacing quickly around the room, shooting out flickers of green flame. The god pinched the bridge of his nose and groaned as his head throbbed from the overweight of magic.

Speaking from the floor, Tony asked, "You can't... you can't heal me?"

Loki turned abruptly to face him, his eyes filling with desperate rage. "There *is nothing* to heal inside of you, Anthony! You are *empty*." He hissed, gesturing to the dull glow in Tony's chest. "I suspect that the only thing keeping your body animated is that device in your chest."

If Tony's face couldn't get more pale, it tried. The god watched as the mortal's hands clutched at the arc reactor.

"Oh shit. I'm a zombie."

Loki snarled and continued pacing, his head feeling as though it was ripping apart.

Where was all the excess power coming from?

There should not have been more inside the core than what I can contain.

Unless...

He stopped abruptly, facing away from Tony. A hysterical laugh shook the god's body before he spun on his heel to face Stark.

"This is all *your* fault!" he shouted, opening his arms wide to gesture, "This is you!"

Tony managed a glare. "Nice, blame the dying guy for your magical hissy fit."

"No," Loki grumbled, rolling his eyes. "You little idiot. This is actually you doing this."

"*Oh*, so we're back to the name calling again?" Tony snarled. "Whatever you say Smurfette."

The god sighed with exasperation, "Oh, just, *shut up*."

He pointed at Tony's chest and shot him with a massive ball of magic.

"I always wanted to go out in a blaze of glory, you know. Now I think I'm off the whole fire, burning, electricity, zapping, crisping thing. Bury me in the damn ground. "

Lying on their backs on the now charred floor of the training room, the two men panted with exhaustion. Loki flopped his head to one side to inspect Tony as he spoke. The god felt a tinge of happiness as his eyes were met with clear brown ones, staring back at him.

Tony groaned and continued, "So it really was me, tearing up the place? How is that possible, by the way? I'm not exactly a wizard like you are, Potter."

"Why are you calling me that? I do not craft ceramics."

Tony laughed into his arm and shook his head, muttering something. Loki frowned, turning his body on its side to face Stark properly.

"Anthony, you do have power in you. Everyone does, it's all about how you channel and shape it. Do you really think that your friend, the green creature, was created by mortal science alone?" Loki ignore Tony's skeptical look and continued. "Your Midgardian science is just a bastardization of our magic. Humans took their magic and formed it into math and metal. Your bodies never stopped generating it, you just channel it differently."

Tony rolled on his side and stared at the god, lost in thought. "Hmmm... that still doesn't explain why I suddenly had this explosive force of magic. Also, why was it in you?" he asked before raising an eyebrow. "Eheheh, 'In you'."

Ignoring Tony's final comment, a soft breath escaped Loki's lips before his fingers touched the arc reactor in Tony's chest. "I believe this may be why. You changed your body in many ways in your struggle to stay alive. What did you use to create this?" he asked, staring at the blue glow shining through his fingers.

Tony frowned and glanced down at the long-fingered hand on his chest. It wasn't something he liked talking about, his past.

*Well, we can avoid most of it.
Right?*

He cleared his throat. "You know all about the Tesseract already. So you probably know about the history with Captain America, right?"

Loki nodded.

"Well. My dad knew Rogers, back in the day. He was my father's greatest 'invention' and his greatest regret. Mr. Capsicle got a little frozen for a while and lost the Tesseract somewhere in the ocean. Long story short, my dad found the Tesseract and not Rogers. He studied it and *ignored* me for pretty much my entire life." Tony's voice started to drip with bitterness. "So he found this new element back in the day and hid the information until he could figure out how to make it. I'm pretty sure the info came from his research on the Tesseract. Between that and his weekly visits to the frozen Sleeping Beauty he had no fucking *time* for me."

Wait, don't go into that.

Tony sighed and rubbed his eyes. "Whatever," he said with a shrug. "The point is, I was dying from my original design. I mean, I made the thing in a cave for Christ's sake. I never really thought that the element could poison me in the long run. I tried a lot of things and got a little reckless until Fury staged an intervention."

Loki let out a huff of laughter and pulled Tony closer, his fingers still tracing the edge of the reactor. Tony shivered a little.

"You're distracting," he said, giving the god a look. "You know that?"

"*Do* continue."

"There's not much else to add. I made the element and used it in my reactor. I guess you could say, I've got a piece of the Tesseract in me."

Loki's eyes went wide before he leaned in closer to inspect the reactor through Tony's shirt. He paused a moment before jerking the black tee up to expose the mortal's chest. Tony yelped. "**Whoa!** Some warning next time. Not that I mind being stripped, you know, but you have some cold-ass hands there."

Loki scoffed and continued to peer at the device. Tony watched him as he tapped the glass plate that housed the device before muttering something and beginning to unscrew the reactor from his chest.

"What are you doing?! *Wait!*" Tony panicked and tried to push him away. Loki looked up, surprised.

"What happens if I remove this, exactly?" he asked, his fingers still around the rim.

Tony tried to calm down and breathe. "In about three minutes, the shrapnel inside me will reach my heart and I will die suddenly and painfully. Now can you screw that back in, before I die suddenly and painfully of a fucking *heart attack*," he finished in a rush.

Loki quickly turned the device back into place. He mumbled quietly, "You have my apologies, Anthony. I was curious about its inner workings since it is heavily based on magic." He paused and looked down at Tony's exposed chest. "I shall not remove it again."

Before Loki could react, Tony was pressed up against him, the mortal's arms wrapping around his thin body. Attempting to ignore the feeling of Stark's warmth absorbing through his own shirt, Loki found himself staring into the brown eyes again.

I never thought I could find brown so appealing.

The temperature seemed to rise in the room as Tony's hands slipped tighter around the god's waist. Before either of them could do anything more, a massive clap of thunder shook the penthouse.

"Oh fucking hell. The God Of Thunder is still up there moping. I forgot to let him know we aren't dead. He's probably just blown the power for everyone in Cali," Tony said, chuckling. He moved to stand up before he found himself flipped over on his back with Loki straddling him.

Oh dear...G-

uh

Loki.

The raven-haired god leaned down, hovering close to Tony's face. A flicker of concern filled the

green eyes that seemed to be analyzing him. Tony started to get concerned for another reason.

Oh fucking hell, if he doesn't move soon he's gonna feel it.

I am not going to go through a high school boner moment right now.

"Uh, Lokes?" Tony asked, carefully.

Loki blinked and smiled down at him, brushing his nose against Tony's gently. "I still have things I wish to speak of, *later...*" he said, his voice a soft purr.

Tony's eyes went wide at the intentions behind the god's voice. "You are *such* a flirt."

Loki's laugh filled the room, causing a wide grin to form on Tony's face. The god was standing before he could blink, offering a hand to help Stark up. As he curled his fingers around Loki's they were suddenly upstairs.

Thor jerked his body around when he felt the familiar rush of air from teleportation. His tear-stained face broke into a glowing smile when he saw the men appear in front of him. Loki was dragged into his brother's arms for a bone crushing hug while his ears suffered the abuse of Thor's booming voice.

"I HAVE NEVER BEEN SO GLAD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, BOTHER!" he roared, before leaning back to look fondly at his brother and then at Tony. "I am glad to see you are both better. I had feared the worse from the sounds above."

"We are not better, Thor," Loki said, pushing himself away from his brother's grasp. "We are very vulnerable to *him* right now."

"Loki..." Thor began, eyeing his brother with concern. "This thing that pursues you... it is Thanos, is it not?"

Loki gave his brother a pitying look. "Thor, I explained already that this was what plagued me through the void. In fact," he continued, his voice growing heavy with anger. "I doubt Thanos would ever have been able to control me if it weren't for that ógeðslegur veru. It has no form, as far as I know, so I had no way to fight him."

Thor looked disheartened that there was no solid enemy to fight. Thor continued to cling to his brother, begging for a way to help save him. Loki finally got fed up and, grabbing Stark, made ready to leave.

"We are heading to bed, and I would suggest you do the same... brother."

Tony had a second to catch Thor's wide gleeful eyes before he was pulled away into the hallway. Laughing, he said to Loki, "You just made his *life*. You're such a *sweetie-poo*!"

Loki sneered and said nothing. Tony slowed to a stop in front of the wide windows in the hallway to the bedrooms. They were designed to highlight all the expensive scenery an ocean front property had to offer. At night, they just showed an endless darkness. Instead of enjoying the view, Tony

felt a shudder of fear creep through him. He watched the dark waves of the ocean crawl towards the shore like a pack of animals on the hunt.

Tony turned suddenly and spoke in a quiet voice. "Loki... we were at our most vulnerable for a while there." He stumbled over his words. "Why didn't...Why didn't that *thing* attack us?"

Loki looked back into his eyes a moment before looking out the window at the sea.

Tony almost missed it when the god finally spoke.

"To it, we are *always* vulnerable."

The Silence

Chapter Summary

Loki had warned him. They were vulnerable. But Loki had only been thinking of Tony and himself.

What he did not anticipate was an attack on ALL of them.

Chapter Notes

edited***

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See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Silence

(Chpt 12)

Their hands found one another in the silence and squeezed comfortingly. There was something strange about watching the ocean without the sounds of crashing waves. It was as though the world had been put on mute.

"I feel like I should blow out this window, too. I want to hear the waves..." Tony trailed off, suddenly realizing how insane he sounded. Beside him, Loki turned his head and smiled.

"We need sleep. Both of us are still in danger after all the trauma we have endured," he said before

pulling Tony down the hall toward the bedroom.

Stark let himself be pulled into his own room like a child. Once there, he shuffled to his oversized bed, falling into it face first.

He called out to Loki, his voice muffled from the covers, "Come on, I doubt I can sleep anyway. You might as well keep me company."

Loki moved over to the bed slowly before lying gracefully beside the exhausted lump of a man. His eyes adjusted to the darkness quickly, allowing him to see Tony's breathing. He watched this for a while, finding simple pleasure in the movement that distinguished the mortal's life.

"I can help you sleep and avoid the dreams," Loki offered quietly. Tony tilted his head to the side, barely able to make out the god in the dark. Seeing a small spark of green light from Loki's eyes, he reached out to touch his cheek.

"Will you be able to sleep too?" he asked, his voice becoming slurred with sleep. "I don't want you up casting spells on me while I sleep like a baby."

"We shall both sleep peacefully. If our minds are still linked, that is."

Tony scooted his body closer, frowning to himself. "When I tried back at SHIELD, I blacked out. You don't think...?" He came to a stop, afraid to speak his fears out loud.

Loki smiled in the dark, nuzzling his face closer to Stark's before gently pushing a thought into the mortal's mind.

"That was because of the machine, Anthony. We should be fine now. After all, we are connected in more ways than we know."

In the glow of the reactor, Tony could just make out Loki's weak smile. He began to grow concerned, unsure if this connection was a good thing, or bad. Tony's entire life revolved around reading people's faces. He always knew just what to say, and what not to say.

Most of the time. 12% of the time.

He found it hard to respond when he couldn't gauge Loki's emotions.

"I... I guess you can technically say I've been inside you. So we can officially say our relationship has gone past first base," he finally thought, with an audible laugh. He closed his eyes.

The god groaned at this and bit the mortal's nose playfully.

"Your mind tends to wallow in the same filthy place as ever, Anthony."

With a squeak at the assault to his face, Tony hid his nose by nuzzling it into Loki's neck. He felt a shiver course through the god.

"Oh, have I found a sensitive spot?" Tony asked out loud. "And yes, my mind does 'tend to wallow' in the gutter."

A low, husky voice purred in Tony's ear, "Do not tempt me more, or I shall exhaust your body until death takes you in her arms... simply out of *pity* for your body."

Tony shivered at the delicious thought, biting back a moan by pressing his face harder into Loki's

shoulder. Instead of feeling the usual sexual tension building up, he instead felt his body relaxing against the one next to him.

Huh, I guess dying a few times takes a toll on the sex drive.

He wrapped his arms around the thin body in front of him and mumbled a response sleepily, "Such a tempting offer. But unless you're into necrophilia, I'll pass for tonight."

Loki chuckled before mumbling something that made the weight of Tony's eyelids grow heavier. A gentle weave of a dreamscape formed in Tony's mind. His eyes tried to snap open in surprise but refused to budge. Both of them were suddenly whisked away into a soft golden realm.

"What?! What is this?"

A solid form of Loki sat beside him on a golden bench, looking out at the garden that grew around them in immaculate forms.

Dream Loki turned his head and smiled warmly, touching Tony's hand before speaking. "It is a place to hide from the darkness. Our physical bodies shall heal without us feeling the pain, and our minds will avoid the nightmares."

Tony had never seen Loki look so pleased with himself. He was looking around the garden with a genuinely happy smile on his face. Stark found his attention torn between the beauty of the imaginary world and the confident delight on Loki's face. He gave up on the scenery and leaned close, giving the raven-haired god a soft kiss. Even within the dream, Tony could feel the physical warmth of Loki's body against his own.

Loki smiled against his lover's lips before cupping Tony's face in his hands.

"Thank you. You do not understand how much you have helped me. You have quite nearly undone *years* of suffering in the course of a month."

Tony flashed the god a smile, his body tilting to one side with exhaustion. The dream world suddenly warped around them, throwing both men into a large green sheeted bed.

Stark cast a glance around the room and mumbled, "This is your room from Asgard, isn't it?"

A sad smile graced Loki's lips as he responded. "It is. It is the easiest to recreate due to the extensive amount of time I had spent there. It was the only place I called home... for the longest time."

"You called my house... home," Tony said, his voice a bare whisper as he dozed off.

A soft blush grew on the god's cheeks before he closed his eyes.

"So I did, Anthony, so I did."

"No."

"Oh come on, seriously? I hate flying in planes, and the suit will draw too much attention right now," Tony said, whining and stomping his foot like a twelve year old.

"No." Loki said, crossing his arms. "And since when have you not desired attention, Stark?"

Tony glared and started to fidget with a cufflink. "Plenty of times. Like, for example, when a massive corporation of spies is on the look out for me. Or perhaps when I'm..." His mouth hung open while he searched for words. "*With* someone who is considered a war criminal."

Loki's eyes narrowed. "Anthony, you fail to understand the reason of my disapproval. It's a much longer distance to New York than up and down a few floors in your house. You recently died... *twice*. I would not suggest you travel that far by magic so soon."

Tony let out an exasperated sigh and rolled his eyes.

This guy, you kiss him a few times and he turns into Steve, the All Caring.

"Look, Lokes, I die every other day around here. More so *lately*, but I think I can handle a little travel," Tony said, plastering his best grin on his face. "Come *on*. If you show up in the Avengers Tower before I do, I can damn well tell you now that Clint will shoot you before he even knows it's you."

"Thor can arrive before me and announce my arrival," Loki said with finality.

A hint of sadness crept into Tony's eyes as he said, "Come on, Lokes. I just... I don't want to be separated from you just yet. Okay?"

The stubborn expression on Loki's face crumbled away leaving uncertain eyes. Instead of speaking he thought his reply.

"That is your true reason for wishing to travel with me?"

Tony's cheeks became pink as he looked back at the god shamefully and thought,

"Yeah, yeah, okay. I honestly don't like the thought of being that far away from you right now. "
He looked down and continued his thought,
"Not after everything that's happened."

"ARE WE LEAVING, BROTHER?"

Both men flinched and turned to see a boisterous Thor swinging his hammer around and grinning. Tony's mouth fell open as he stared at the beaming god.

Thor's almost glowing with happiness.
The man looks like he just tied his own shoes for the first time.

A quiet through from Loki crept into his mind,
"Kæri Óðinn, hvað hefði ég gjört? I knew I would regret this."

Tony laughed, sneaking his hand into Loki's and giving it a squeeze.

"Better leave now, Lokes, before he hugs you so hard he pulls a Bane on your spine."

Loki smiled sweetly at his brother before they disappeared from sight. Thor continued to grin at the empty room before running off to find a balcony he could fly off from.

There was the whizzing sound of an arrow before Stark realized they had arrived. Loki spun him around behind his back, knocking Stark to the floor. The god easily caught the arrow in mid-flight.

"You *did* warn me, Anthony," Loki said with a snarl, tossing the arrow aside. "Yet you insisted we come anyway."

When he received no witty response he turned to look at the mortal. Tony was on the floor staring up at the ceiling looking pale and confused. Loki was beside him in a second, already sending magic into Tony's body to heal him.

"Oh stop it, I'm fine," Tony said, waving him off and sitting up on his own. "It was the swirly bit at the end that got me. Get your perverted magic fingers out of me."

A laugh broke out from behind Loki. "Aha, shit, sorry guys." Clint said, snapping his bow into a compact form. "I just saw the motion out of the corner of my eye and shot. Be glad it was me and not Nat. I don't think Loki here can catch bullets."

"You would be surprised," the god said with a smirk.

Clint came over and helped Tony up with a grunt. Dusting him off with a grin, he gestured to the door.

"Let's go see the others. They've been worrying like a bunch of mother hens." Clint paused. "Oh, and Tony? Your man-pad at the top of the tower is still empty. No one wanted to move in there; it's sorta' like a mausoleum for you."

Tony stared at him and muttered, "Thanks, that's not unwelcoming or *creepy* in any way." He shouted after the archer's retreating back. "I'll just hop on up there and find a black tux to change into. Think you can find me some flowers? I'm sure Agent Romanoff can conjure up a priest for my last rights!"

They heard Clint snort from somewhere down the hall.

Loki jumped a little when Tony suddenly leaned on him.

"Anthony? What is wrong?"

Tony nuzzled his face into the god's arm and mumbled his response into the fabric of Loki's sleeve. "I don't really like being in this tower anymore. Nether of us have very good memories of this place."

"It's a pleasure to see you here again sir," Jarvis politely interrupted. "I have assisted the Avengers since they moved into the tower."

Tony cast a glare towards the ceiling.

"You really choose the best moments to talk, you know that Jarvis?"

The AI stayed silent and Tony shrugged his body away from Loki's with a wobble, heading for the door. They entered the common room and were greeted by a bunch of curious stares. Both Banner and Rogers jumped up when they walked in.

"Oh thank *god*, Tony," Bruce said, hugging Stark tightly. "I thought you were going to die for real this time."

Steve glanced between Tony and Loki almost guiltily. "Loki, I am glad you're alright too," he said nervously, shuffling his feet a little before looking sternly into the god's eyes. "You have my apologies for not intervening before SHIELD did that to you both."

Loki was taken aback for a moment before a familiar smirk formed. "That is quite alright, Captain, as you did your part in saving our *small* damsel in distress before hand."

Tony's head snapped around, shouting mentally, "*HEY!*"

Loki winced and turned to glare at Stark.

"*What?*"

"*Leave my height out of this.*"

"*It's nearly out of the picture as it is, Anthony.*"

Tony's eyes narrowed, shifting closer to the god. "*I take back calling you a Smurf. You're more like a Jolly. Green. GIANT.*"

With a low growl, Loki hunched over dangerously as he moved closer to the shorter man. A small wave of green magic grew between his fingers. Both Bruce and Steve had backed off a little, looking over at the others for help.

The archer cleared his throat and said in a calming voice, "Okay guys, I don't know what's going on since, you know, we can't *hear* you. How about you calm down?"

Tony grinned nastily and said out loud, "Yeah, Lokes, why don't you *cool* down?"

The magic condensed into an angry green ball, the god's eyes starting to glow with rage.

There was a tense moment before Tony decided to poke the beast one last time.

"*You started it, Frosty.*"

Loki snapped and flicked the ball of magic directly at Stark's chest. Everyone in the room instantly tensed. Natasha had her guns in hand and Clint had already cocked an arrow, aimed at Loki's head. The magic hit with a shower of blue sparks before evaporating into a harmless puff of smoke. Tony looked down at the glowing reactor in his chest and back at Loki. He snorted, and suddenly both of them were laughing.

"Oh shit," Tony gasped between bubbles of laughter. "Thor was right, it's true, Lokes!"

Loki turned away from the others, doubling over with silent laughter. The rest of the team stared in confusion as the two of them calmed down.

"Uh, sure okay, guys," Clint grumbled with a frown. "Care to explain what the *fuck* that was about?" With a single fluid movement, he put his arrow away. "Also, if you don't mind, how in the hell did Loki's magic just bounce off your chest?" he added, glaring at Stark.

Tony looked at Loki and back at the others. "He called me short," he said, pointing at the god.

Bruce crossed his arms and spoke in a low, warning tone. "You *are* short. Explain the part about the magic. *Now.*"

"You're about the same height, Leprechaun," Tony replied. He flinched at Bruce's deepening glare and continued, "Uh so, Loki and I are sort of soulmates. So apparently we now can't magically hurt one another. Oh, also, I'm a wizard." He posed with his hands on his hips, looking around with a room with a childish glint in his eye. Loki rolled his eyes and dropped his head into one hand.

Natasha snorted, tilting her head to one side, before asking, "You are soul mates and... a wizard? That explains absolutely nothing, Stark. Well, *one* thing." Her hand opened and gestured to Clint. The archer grumbled, digging around in his pocket a moment before pulling out a twenty-dollar bill and handing it to her.

"I hope you were placing bets on the wizard part, not the soul mate part," Tony said dryly.

They were interrupted by a strange sound from Steve.

"*Whathuhno?* What are you saying, Stark?" he asked, looking between the two in a panic. "For one thing, you are both men. For another, didn't you love Ms. Pots? Also, wasn't he an enemy not that long ago?" He stumbled back to the couch and sat, looking more confused.

Tony sighed and looked over at Loki for help. The god was ignoring them, his head still in his hands and a soft shake to his shoulders.

That bastard is still laughing.

"Capsicle," Tony began, sounding tired. "Guys can be together too. The thing is..." He paused and looked at all of them, biting his lip. "Things with Pepper were... different from the start. Plus, some stuff happened before we left the planet that sort of ended it a while back. Honestly, it took all of this," he waved his hands around dramatically. "To figure all of that out. Loki and I are together, for *real*. I think."

Natasha's eyebrow went up at the last part. Tony made a point of ignoring it.

"The thing is, we're somehow connected inside. Long story short, we are soup-for-the-soul mates, I've got magic in me, sort of. Oh, and we're together because *welike* each other." He stopped for a beat before adding, "I think."

"I *know*," Loki said directly. Tony blushed and shuffled over in embarrassment to stand awkwardly next to the god.

Several people spoke at once.

"What do you mean *magic*? You can't-"

"How do guys even... Fondue? He's still-"

"I don't even want to know -"

Loki snaked his fingers between Stark's and gave his hand a reassuring squeeze.

"***Listen***," he started, silencing them with a glare. "This is not the most important topic to be focused on currently. I shall attempt to explain more about the magic when we know more. For know, understand this, Anthony and I are threatened not only by your SHIELD agents but from something far more dangerous."

Clint moved to say something, but was silenced by Loki's hand. He continued, "None of you should be directly involved should the thing attack. His targets are myself and Anthony alone. I do feel as though I should warn you now..." He cast a warning glare them as his voice became

threatening. "There is absolutely *nothing* you can do to stop it. Should he arrive, there is no need to put yourselves needlessly in harm's way. I repeat, you will *not* be able to help."

Silence enveloped the room with a cold familiar feeling. Tony could hear a rushing sound in his ears and was reminded for a moment of the silent ocean from last night. His eyes traveled over the pale faces in front of them, before he smiled weakly.

"As poetically dramatic as Gonzo here makes it sound," he said, as his hands began to shake. "It's a very real threat. When I died, uh, the first time... the thing was there, and I caught its attention. "

Bruce cleared his throat and asked, "What is this thing, exactly?"

Tony's eyes glazed over and Loki took over answering. "I can not say. What little I do know of him is better to not be spoken of. I can only say that it was my only company in the void. Or, I should say, its only source of *entertainment*."

Thor broke up the silence that had fallen after Loki spoke by smashing through a window and rolling into the room. The window fixed itself a moment later, thanks to Loki.

Thor stood and brushed himself off, addressing Loki cheerfully. "BROTHER!"

Loki grimaced and slithered behind Stark, holding him in front of his body like a shield. Tony, the useless shield that he was, laughed and moved closer to the happy blond while verbally threatening Loki with hugs and puppies. In the end, Thor picked both of them up and crushed them into a massive hug.

"Oh for...Thor!" Loki groaned, "Being pushed through a meat grinder would be more gentle."

"Lokes, I blame you if my spleen ruptures. In fact," Tony whimpered, "I don't want you to heal it, just so I can sue you. "

A sneer formed on Loki's face before he faded from Thor's arms and reappeared in front of them. Tony sent a threatening glare at Thor before the god dropped him.

"My apologies, Tony. I was just so happy after last night."

"Oh, did you two announce your wedding last night?" Clint asked, a shit-eating grin firmly stuck on his face. Thor's eyes went wide at the archer before he tore his gaze away to face his brother.

"BROTHER?! YOU DID NOT TELL ME-" he began.

"SHUT UP, THOR!" Loki screamed, surprising everyone. It had been a long time since they had heard the god scream at someone. The last time had been, well, here. Tony frowned, remembering the crazed shouts Loki used to use on mortals.

Only when he wants you to kneel.

Or if he's screaming in pain.

Nether of those are good things.

"You're *blundering* cheerfulness has turned a serious conversation into a comedic act," Loki hissed now, backing away from Thor. "Why must you always make everything about *you*!?"

Flinching away from his angry brother and visibly deflating, Thor mumbled apologetically, "I am so sorry, bro- Loki, please continue what you were speaking of before I interrupted."

Loki snarled, "I no longer wish to *talk* about it."

Tony moved towards him, reaching out a hand. "Lokes, you-"

"NO!"

Tony flinched away from his anger, in turn startling Loki. Loki stared at the mortal, reading pain and fear in his face.

Loki grimaced at his lover's response before a rush of air filled the space where the god had disappeared.

The silence blanketed the room yet again. Tony spoke quietly to his AI, "Jarvis?"

"He is in the penthouse, sir."

Casting a sad look around the room, Tony felt an ache start to grow in his chest. This room was filled with his friends, his team. He had just told them that he was dating, not only a man, but the very god who attacked the city they were currently in. They knew about the dark, silent, thing that was pursuing them. What Tony had expected was criticism. Instead, their faces were not filled with judgment, but sympathy.

Judgment I can handle.

Sympathy I can't.

He escaped the silent room, taking the elevator up to the penthouse.

The room he entered felt cold and stale. Loki recognized the bar in front of him and realized this was where he had once thrown Tony out of the building. A lump of guilt settled into his gut as he paced over to the very window he tossed his lover through just a month ago.

Or was it a year?

There wasn't a single sign of damage left anywhere on the building. Leaning his head against the cool glass, he finally let out the aggravated sigh that had been held in for far too long. The sound of the elevator reaching the floor caused him to turn away from the widow.

"Oh, reminiscing about the good old days, Loki?"

He frowned at the formal name Tony used and looked into the mortal's eyes as he approached.

Tony met the god's eyes, searching for clues on the emotions tormenting his boyfriend. Loki looked a lot like he did back in the cave. The body that had finally began to look more human was thin and pale again after the removal of his magic. Loki's eyes revealed a broken and anguished god, yet again.

Tony's chest tightened at the sight. Before the god could respond to his sarcasm, he rushed over and hugged him.

"Sorry... I'm sorry, Lokes."

Loki froze upon contact but after a moment, snuck his hands around the shorter man's shoulders. "Do not be scared of me," he begged, his voice hinting at unshed tears. "Please never be scared of me, Anthony. *Please.*"

"I'm not scared of you, Lokes. I'm scared *for* you, I'm scared of hurting you or making you mad." Tony grunted. "Well, okay, more mad than usual." He added in a whisper, "I'm scared of *losing* you to that darkness again."

Loki let out a content sigh and nuzzled his face happily into Tony's shoulder. A small ,comfortable silence filled the room, so unlike the one Tony had left downstairs. Something had felt so terrifyingly *wrong* about the silence downstairs. A deep frown formed on Tony's face as he tried to place a finger on what felt so off about it.

"Loki... when you left downstairs, did you notice anything?" he asked, leaning back to look at the god.

Loki's brow furrowed as he thought, a hand absent-mindedly rubbing Tony's back. "I had not noticed anything in particular." He responded slowly, unsure of what Stark was asking him. "I was angry and left with great haste. Why do you ask?"

Tony thought back to the faces he left behind. What was it that felt so off about it?

I'm not used to sympathy, but it wasn't that.

It felt so heavy, and no one even moved to stop me when I left.

No one moved at all.

No one even breathed.

The silence.

In the silence there had been a **rustle**.

"Oh fuck, it *can't* be."

Chapter End Notes

I seriously creeped myself out. I have problems.

The Darkness

Chapter Summary

In which we meet the monster.

Chapter Notes

NOTE: The words in Italics that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

[Disclaimer: I do not, in anyway, own these characters. All rights belong to Marvel etc.]

(See the end of the chapter for more notes.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Darkness

(Chapter 12)

"It can not be what?" Loki was asking as Tony pushed away from him and ran to the elevator. His fingers jabbed at the buttons in a hysterical manner. His mouth opened as he searched for words to explain what he felt. The silence that had been there the whole time, that grew every day. A feeling he got when he entered a room back at his home in California. Why hadn't he noticed it before?

"They didn't move, Loki. No one moved when I left," he said, turning to look at the god. Tony's pupils were dilated with fear.

Loki stared at the man in front of him in confusion. He wasn't making any sense.

"Anthony..." he said carefully. "What do you mean?"

Tony smashed his fist into the button and shouted at Loki, "THEY DIDN'T MOVE! Lokes, they were just*fucking sitting there*. Completely silent. Look, I can't explain it, but I need you to trust me right now. "

Loki furrowed his brow at the panicking man in front of him and tried to fit the pieces together.

A hint of a song floated through the air, filling the quiet afternoon air.

The voice was familiar.

The color drained from Loki's face as he muttered, staring at Tony in pure terror. "Ó kæri guðum níu Realms... *no*."

Fumbling with the bracelets to call his suit, Tony made for the stairs before a tight grip on his arm stopped him.

"Stop!" Loki hissed, pulling the man back. "You cannot simply rush in and attack this... this thing."

"Do *NOT* tell me what to do!" Tony grunted, his anger flaring up. "Those are my friends down there being played with by some ethereal freak. I'm going down!"

"I was not telling you to abandon them, just listen a moment." Loki's voice lowered as he continued. "We shall go in invisible. It will still sense us, but we will make a harder target. Understand?"

Tony bit his lip and nodded, pushing the god away and calling his suit to him. Loki's eyes flashed bright as something cold showered down over Tony's body, causing him to shiver.

"What the hell was that?"

"We are invisible now. Hold my hand and have your weapons ready. We are departing."

Tony gripped the god's hand, crouching down in a fighting stance. Loki's knees bent, ready to spring forward. Suddenly they were downstairs. Neither of them moved an inch while their eyes scanned the room for any sign of the creature. All they found were the frozen stares of the Avengers.

Thor stood where Tony had left him, half turned towards the elevator. His mouth was open a little as if he was about to speak. Clint was leaning forward off the couch as if about to jump up. Beside him, Steve sat looking forlorn.

Tony felt like vomiting, seeing his friends like this. He swallowed the taste of bile and thought to Loki,

"*What the fuck is this?*"

Instead of the god's voice a sickening giggle entered his mind. Tony eyes snapped to Loki quickly, finding him looking just as surprised.

"**You dislike my little set, Anthony Stark?**" the voice inside his head drawled.

"You bet your ass I don't like it. Speaking of ass, why don't you show yourself so we can see who we're talking to?"

Tony's eyes flickered around the room, finding it hard to see now that the sun seemed to have set. He turned his night vision on before he realized something.

Wait a minute, it's three in the afternoon here.

The windows were jet black, impossibly dark for the city of New York. The city that never sleeps also had a never ending supply of night lights. Startled by a sudden blast of magic from his side, Tony turned to see Loki panting and looking around wildly.

"D-Do not touch me!" His voice rose into a panicked shriek.

"Oh, but I missed you so dearly... Loki. The void is not the same without your screams." The voice was louder and more clear than before.

The god shot another blast into a corner, his eyes growing more crazed. **"DO NOT TOUCH ME AGAIN!"** he screamed. Tony came close enough to bump Loki's shoulder gently, letting the god know he was there. Loki's eyes flicked his way, clearly startled by the touch.

"I can't see it, Lokes, even with my night vision."

"What a darling pet name you gave my little Loki," it said with amusement. Tony could feel the toothy grin in its voice. **"I think I shall use that from now on. What do you think, Lokes?"**

Loki let out a whimper before Tony interrupted. "Sorry, can't let you do that. See, I patented that name. It belongs to me and only I can say who's allowed to use it. "

There was a pause before the darkness closed in around them, obscuring the view of his friends.

"You think you are very amusing, mortal? Your quips and witty remarks are a shallow cover up for the fear I smell on you."

Tony felt a breath on his neck and spun around to fire a blaster at it. He saw nothing but impenetrable darkness.

"Lokes I don't think—"

Loki froze, his body facing away from where Stark had been standing. He turned slowly around, knowing what he would find. Darkness. A soft wail escaped his lips as the shadows closed in, sneaking ever closer.

He fell to his knees, a pain burning through his chest as though his heart was on fire.

"N-no... not him. Take anything but *him*," he begged.

Savage laughter shook the entire room.

"For one renowned for his wit, you truly are a fool. My dear, my greatest desire is always to do exactly what you do not wish me to do." The voice cackled again, but was then suddenly whispering in the god's ear, **"He will be my meat puppet. I shall make him dance for me; murder his comrades, ruin his life. And when it is finished, I shall make him kill himself. Just for you, Lokes."**

Loki bit into his lip, drawing blood. His despair and hatred, the burning feeling in his chest, intensified each time the thing used Stark's nickname for him. The nickname he had finally started to like. The name only Tony called him.

The name only Anthony was allowed to use.

His emotions spiraled out of control as an unnatural smile broke out on his face. Something inside him snapped, as a psychotic laugh burst forth from his bleeding lips. With another hysterical bark of laughter, he sent plumes of green flame into the dark. Suddenly blue sparks shattered the blackness, interrupting Loki's moment of insanity and causing him to stumble backwards. They disappeared as a crackling sound grew into a roar. A blue light started to grow, driving back the shadows.

"Loki?!"

Loki felt his heart begin to beat again. "Tony!?" he shouted in response. "Tony, where are you?"

Tony's voice sounded strained. "Loki, hit the deck!"

Hit the duck? What on earth is the man telling me to do?

There was the furious roar of a retreating beast, and something brushed past the god on its way out. The blue light solidified before exploding into the recesses of the room. Loki ducked and covered his head with his arms, his body shuddering from the shock wave. Sparks of harmless electricity danced around his body, gently tickling his skin. When he raised his head again, the room was filled with its natural NYC light. There was a collective groan of its inhabitants finally beginning to move again. Loki panicked and looked around for his lover.

"T-Tony?" he queried softly, ignoring the beginnings of complaints and questions from the rest of the team. Standing, he looked around the room desperately until he spotted the red and gold metal suit on the floor. Fear gripped his heart yet again as he ran over to the metal man. He found his mind probing for any sort of response.

"Tony... please... speak to me?"

An arm reached up suddenly and tilted back the metal mask. Loki was greeted with the exhausted but pleased face of Tony.

"I'm fine, Lokes," he answered, his voice hoarse. "Just need a moment to get my legs back."

Loki touched the mortal's face gently, fighting back a wave of relieved tears.

I am not going to start crying in front of the Avengers, much less my foolish brother.

Speaking of my brother...

"Loki! What sort of trickery have you pulled now?" shouted Thor, his hammer in hand and temper on the rise.

Loki glanced over his shoulder at a confused group of people. Steve had a hand on Thor's shoulder as if to hold the god back. The female was staring at the wall, expressionless. The only hint of her emotions were her hands nervously rubbing up and down her arms.

Loki sighed in aggravation. "Do not try to make this out as my doing, all of you saw me leave before this happened. What, pray tell, do any of you actually remember?"

Tony sat up gingerly and let his suit fall away from his body, the pieces neatly folding into a suitcase. He felt stiff but his body was raging with energy. It was mildly nauseating, like having way too much adrenaline in his system. He glanced up at the faces of his teammates, trying to find a balance between caring about what was going on and not passing out.

"I recall Tony, on his way after you," said Thor, sounding less angry and more concerned.

Bruce had his head in his hands, not looking at anyone as he spoke. "Tony was leaving and then I heard this... rustling sound," he said, his voice lowering into a mumble. "Like wings or something. Then it was just, dark. Until just now, with that lightning stuff."

Tony looked at the god beside him and frowned. Loki smiled faintly, sneaking his hand over to squeeze Stark's gently. They both were too exhausted after the past week.

"I feel all stiff, like I've been sitting for hours," Clint said as he rubbed his butt shamelessly.

Tony raised an eyebrow at the archer's actions and decided to settle with the short version. "Okay guys, listen. I did leave, you just stopped uh... being awake before I actually left the room. I felt like something was wrong once I got upstairs but I couldn't place it."

If only I had realized sooner...

He continued with a hint of guilt. "You guys were sorta frozen. I mean, Capsicle here should recognize the feeling."

Steve glared at Tony for a moment before shrugging off the comment. "He is right ,actually. This stiffness in your body comes from being unable to move for a long time."

Tony grinned at his mild victory against the captain. "Anyway, we came down, guns-a-blazin," he said cheerfully. "Well, blasters, magic, same shit."

Thor was ignoring Tony completely, simply staring at his brother. In a very quiet voice, he asked, "Loki, what was this creature?"

There was a heavy pause that caused a coil of fear to grow in Tony's stomach.

No more silence for me today, thanks.

Loki cleared his throat. "I believe you have just had the pleasure of meeting our pursuer."

A few questions and plans were thrown around before Loki started ignoring the Avengers and focused solely on his lover. Tony wasn't looking as healthy as he would have liked, or as healthy as he had looked before everything started happening at once. Ignoring some question about a Balrog from Clint, which started a long explanation of The Lord Of the Rings to Thor, he placed his hands on Tony's chest.

"What's up, Lokes?" Tony asked, glancing down at the thin fingers pressed against his body.

A second after asking, he felt the usual thrill of Loki's magic crawling around inside him. Raising an eyebrow in question at his lover, he waited for an answer. Tony continued to wait for a few minutes, noticing the god's eyebrows drew together in confusion. It was rather cute to see him concentrating so hard.

It's nice to see it when we aren't dying or being attacked.

Maybe I should get him a Rubik's cube just as an excuse to see his pouty thinking face.

"Tony."

"Yep? What is it? Don't you *dare* tell me I'm dying. It's not funny anymore. Maybe a month ago it would be, but it's too soon, man. Too soon."

He was trying to sound like his usual flippant self, not wanting to admit that he was terrified of everything that had just happened. This was how he dealt with fear and stress. Everyone else just had to deal with it. Loki started to smile, a small smirk at first until a wide happy grin filled his face. Tony stared and felt his rambling fears stop in their tracks.

"I guess I'm not kicking the bucket then?" he asked, sitting up straighter. "Unless I missed the memo about appropriate emotions for when your boyfriend is dying."

Loki chuckled, a soft flush reaching his cheeks. "You are not dying, Anthony. If you could shut up for a moment I will tell what has happened." Tony gave a sulky nod in response. Loki continued, "That blue light, the electricity, that was you?"

Another quiet nod from Tony, this time with his face showing his concern. Loki opened his mouth to speak and suddenly felt the attention of everyone in the room around him. He glanced around to find that everyone was indeed staring and waiting for what he was about to say.

Still smiling he turned to Tony and said happily, "Anthony, you just used magic."

An uncomfortable silence tried to fill the room, but was quickly squashed by Tony.

"Oh. Is that what that was? I thought it felt a little weird," he said, looking down at his chest thoughtfully.

Loki shifted his hand from his chest and touched the arc reactor. Everyone in the room tensed at this, fingers finding guns and arrows.

"What did you do, exactly?" Loki asked, his hand still resting on the reactor. "You should not have been able to use magic freely like that without learning about your core and the branches of Yggdrasil. "

"Honestly? I panicked."

Loki gave him a look.

"I freaked out when I lost you in the dark. I got pissed off and started shooting around kinda recklessly. Then I just..." he paused, his hand meeting Loki's at his reactor. "I felt it there. I mean I usually feel something from my reactor, but It was so much stronger than usual. I just reached out and used whatever I could. I felt like it was exactly what I needed to make him leave."

Loki was smiling with pride and a dash of amazement. His mortal lover, finding magic and using it for the first time against something twenty times more powerful.

And it ran away.

Bruce's face suddenly popped into the god's field of vision. Loki bit back a snarl at his closeness, choosing not to move away, regardless of the discomfort.

"You *seriously* just performed magic?" Bruce asked, hunkering down close to Stark.

"There is no *performance* in magic, Dr. Banner," Loki snapped, unable to hold back a snarky remark. "It is not one of your childish shows for mortal amusement."

The doctor looked at the god for a moment and nodded apologetically.

Tony gave Loki a look that clearly read as "Calm-down-before-you-snark-everyone-to-death."

Loki kindly ignored both of them and removed his hands from Tony's chest, refusing to move any further away than that. Banner had already started poking at his patient, checking Tony's pulse and eyes. When he pulled up Tony's shirt to look at the reactor, exposing Stark's bare skin, Loki stiffened.

Why is he looking at Tony's chest like that, he thought.

He's not allowed to touch him like that.

Only I can do that.

He felt an unusual feeling crawl up his throat and heard a soft roar in his ears. Loki bit his tongue when he recognized the feeling was jealousy. Heat threatened to rise in his face in embarrassment of such a childish emotion. He started to feel angry.

What am I doing, becoming a lover of a mortal in the first place? How small a thing this is. I do not feel jealousy over a mortal .

Tony had stopped paying attention to his friend's doctor-babble when he saw Loki tense. He watched his lover remain stiff and unmoving after Bruce had pulled up his shirt, his eyes glazed over.

Oh...

"Hey, Bruce? As much as I like putting my body on display for people," he started, interrupted by a snort from the couch. He shot off a glare before he continued, "I think I'm physically fine. I also think I should save myself for my boyfriend."

He watched as Loki twitched at "boyfriend", his attention drawn back to Tony once more. The green eyes rose to meet his, a silent question in them. Tony shrugged and nodded as a response, hoping that was the right answer. Bruce looked between the two and grew flustered, pulling Tony's shirt back down.

"Thanks buddy," Tony said, flashing his friend a grin. "I'll let you run some tests on me if I manage to play with magic again."

Thor, still standing over the group on the floor, waited for Loki's sarcastic response to Tony's phrasing about magic. He chuckled to himself when he heard none. So Tony was allowed to make fun of his brother's precious magic?

"Well guys, I'm officially beat. It was fun, the whole emotional roller coaster. Oh, and being attacked by that thing was such a pleasure," Tony said, batting his eyes at the ceiling as if the creature could see him. "I'm gonna head upstairs and crash if anyone doesn't mind?"

Natasha rolled her eyes and Clint laughed. "Are you actually asking us?" the archer asked. "What if we did mind? You two haven't exactly explained anything."

"Then I guess I don't give a fuck," Tony said, standing up shakily and heading once more for the elevator. "And I'm going to sleep. Suck it, Legolas."

Loki was curled around his body like some sort of big cat on a tree branch, limbs draped over Tony in lazy contentment. Their faces were close together, neither caring enough to think about how intimate their position was. After all the excitement of the afternoon, this was extremely comforting. Neither of them felt like sleeping, so they just lay there together and breathed.

After a short while, Tony raised a question that had been bugging him. "Hey, what did you mean by 'find my core'?"

The god blinked, coming back from his drifting thoughts. He had expected the question, but was disoriented by the suddenness of it.

"Your core is the center of your being or your soul. It's the well from which your magic is drawn

from. When I was a young child I discovered it by accident," Loki said, smiling at the memory. "I surprised my mother by filling the room with her favorite flowers just by thinking of it. "

Tony whistled, impressed. "So you're some sort of magical genius?"

"I suppose I am," Loki said with a chuckle. "I was much more advanced than any of my teachers. Regardless, it takes a while to draw the magic out correctly and by will. What I did with the flowers was an uncontrolled burst of power. My mother knew I needed a tutor immediately, before it became dangerous." He frowned and looked away over Tony's shoulder. Tony watched his favorite green eyes grow sad as old memories of happy times came back to the god.

He leaned close, nuzzling into the god's neck. "You really love your mom, don't you?"

"I do," Loki responded, a soft sigh of air brushing against Tony's neck. "Although I am sure she no longer loves me. I am unsure if she ever did. I, the monster in the household of Odin."

Tony growled and bit down on the neck in front of him. Loki grunted and leaned back, surprised.

"I said already, you are *NOT* a monster. My word is law around here, so believe it." Tony reached up and flicked Loki's nose, continuing irritably, "I doubt she thinks that, if she knew all along about your true form, and still cared so much about you. Don't go insulting her like that."

Loki stared at the mortal, ignoring the zing of pain from his neck.

He bit me!

He flicked me!

This mortal is like an untamed animal. If he were anyone else I would have.. .

Loki laughed quietly and nodded. "You are correct," he said, his voice growing softer. "I feel certain she still loved me before everything that has happened. But right now I am unsure of what she knows, and it worries me."

Tony looked at him strangely before suddenly capturing Loki's lips with his. After the initial surprise wore off, Loki deepened the kiss. His fingers slid through the mortal's soft brown hair, granting him the satisfaction of a low moan from Tony. Loki's tongue poked at Stark's lips tentatively before gaining entrance, a shiver of pleasure racing through his body.

After some time Tony reluctantly broke the kiss, letting out a content sigh. He had kissed a lot of women in his time, but there were no lips quite like a god's.

Maybe just this god.

His eyes fell on the thin pink lips he had just had the pleasure of enjoying. Loki's tongue darted out to lick them, as if to capture any remaining taste of Tony. He felt arousal coil up inside his belly and his heart started to race.

All this from a tongue?

God damn, he is hot.

The bell to the elevator chimed from the living room. Someone was coming up to see them. Tony panicked, his first thoughts leaping to the creature they had just fought.

Loki raised an eyebrow at him and chuckled knowingly. "Do not fret," he said calmly, "I would know if it were him. I believe it is my brother coming to see us."

"Should we bother moving? I'm way to comfortable right now."

Loki chuckled and looked over Tony's shoulder at the door. There was a faint knock, and before Stark could answer, Loki was kissing him again. Not only kissing him, but pushing him onto his back and straddling his waist.

Whoa, whoa!

The kiss became more passionate and rough as more knocks were heard. Thor's voice sounded through the door. "Brother? Anthony? It has been an hour, and we had hoped to eat together."

Tony shuddered and tried not to groan into the kiss, afraid that Thor would hear them. He felt Loki gently grind down against his waist, sending a new wave of pleasure throughout his body. Tony was already excited from the previous kisses, but this was the last straw. He thrust his hips shamelessly against the god, letting him feel the obvious hard-on he had. Thor's muted voice asked something and the door suddenly swung open. Tony couldn't even register what was going on outside of everything Loki. Until a strangled gasp finally caught their attention, causing the kiss to end.

Loki, his head still leaning low over Tony, glanced over his shoulder at his brother. It was not the first time Thor had thought of his brother as cat-like. Loki's body was like a panther, leaning over his dying prey. Stark was doing a good impression of the dying animal as he attempted to catch his breath. Thor frowned at the sparks of amusement in his brother's green eyes. He had known that Thor would come in, and undoubtably had planned for him to see them doing such things.

Thor let out a sigh. "Brother, stop using Tony as a way to cause me discomfort." He turned to leave. "Please come down soon, we wish to eat together, and Banner has become frighteningly grumpy."

Loki laughed as his brother shut the door behind him, shaking his head at the images now burnt into his memory.

"Well that killed the mood. A *lot*," Tony said with a chuckle.

The god looked down at him and felt a stir of happiness at the dazed look in Stark's eyes. It gave him an immense amounts of satisfaction to drive the mortal into such a state.

"Let us join your friends for food," he said with a small smile. "Since the atmosphere has been ruined by my dear brother."

"You did it on purpose, didn't you?" Tony said, giving the god one more thrust with his hips. "And here I thought you actually wanted me."

Loki grunted at the thrust and tilted his head to the side, leaning up and looking down at Tony. Tony bit back the rush of desire he felt when the god looked down at him from above. Loki's face was lustful and proud. It was by far the damnedest sexiest thing he had ever seen.

"I do want you, fool," Loki purred. "I may have put on a bit of a show for my brother, but do not think I would go that far only to use you."

Tony blushed as his eyes traveled down the god's body above him, finally spotting proof that the god wasn't lying.

Oh fucking hell, he's just as turned on as I am.

Oh my god, I am not gonna be able to walk if this keeps up.

Tony wriggled a little, trying to think calming, not-sexy-Loki thoughts.

"I think..." he started, looking away from Loki. "If we are going to go eat, you should probably move."

Loki tilted his head more and slithered his hands up into Tony's shirt. "Why should I?" he asked in a low husky voice.

"Because if you don't, I will show your brother a much more traumatizing scene of me bending you over the table and—"

"Alright, fine," Loki snapped, sitting up and slithering off Stark's body with ease.

Rising from the bed, Tony leaned over close to his lover's face and muttered, "What are we, Lokes? Is it okay for me to keep calling you my boyfriend?"

The god's eyes widened at the question. "I do not know the word, exactly. But I do understand the implication," Loki said, looking at Tony sadly. "I know we are connected by so-called 'fate', but I always felt the need to do things my own way."

Tony felt his heart drop at his words, a frown forming on his face. Loki stiffened, realizing how his words sounded, and tentatively brushed his fingers over his cheek.

"Fear not, Anthony, I consider you my... lover."

A blush formed on the god's pale face, sending Stark another zing to his gut.

"Sir," Jarvis said, sounding amused. "Your team has made threats, that I will not repeat, if you do not come down soon."

"Those jerks." Tony stretched his arms above his head, already regretting agreeing to eat with them. "I let them live in my tower, and this is how they treat me? Jarvis, tell them if they're gonna threaten me, I can lock them in that room with no food until they beg me to come out."

Loki huffed with laughter and stood, pulling Tony up with him. "I do wonder sometimes, Anthony, if you are the better villain."

"Don't sell yourself short, sweet-cheeks. I haven't demanded any of them to kneel yet."

Loki rolled his eyes at the nick-name and thought to him, "*Keep that up and I shall start calling you hässlichen Affen.*"

"Since when can you speak German?" Tony asked, glaring at the god. "Jarvis, what's hash lichy Aarken?"

There was a pause as the AI processed information. "I believe, if I heard correctly, it translates as 'Ugly Monkey'."

Tony sneered at the god. "Whatever, Babe the Big Blue Ox. Let's go eat before Bruce hulks Out."

Loki flashed a mocking grin at his lover and kissed his mouth once more, sending them downstairs as soon as their lips made contact. They both appeared amidst their friends, Tony blushing

furiously and pushing the god away from him. Ignoring the cat-calls and whistles, he proceeded to order obnoxious amounts of pizza, swearing that none of them were allowed to have any.

Chapter End Notes

Should I add the next ten or so chapters in one solid chunk so everyone is caught up? They are all edited after this point. Up until chapter 20.

Avoutrie

Chapter Summary

In which there is a new Avenger.
[Just kidding, it isn't really.]

Chapter Notes

This needs one more edit.

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

[Disclaimer: I do not, in anyway, own these characters. All rights belong to Marvel etc.]

(See the end of the chapter for more notes.)

Avoutrie

(Chapter 13)

Five days later Tony is standing at four in the morning, staring at his bed.

I'm not going to even bother trying to sleep.

He turned around to take the elevator back down to his workroom where he has spent the last three nights alone, staying awake with a new project. He smiled bitterly at the memory of his first night back in the tower.

"What do you mean you 'require a room'? You don't want to sleep with me? " Tony asked, trying not to whine.

Loki let out a sigh and rolled his eyes, "As pleasant as it is to be near you, I would rather I had a room of my own. I shan't be sleeping with you every night, Anthony."

"Why not? Don't we sleep better that way?" He frowned.

"Aren't we *safer* the closer we are?"

"He is after me, for the most part. You are *safer* sleeping alone."

No matter how hard Tony begged and whined and argued, Loki would not relent. They spent the first night together, sleeping peacefully in each other's arms. It had been one of the best nights of his life, and he wasn't even getting laid.

The next night he went to sleep around twelve and woke up screaming an hour later. He left his room immediately to hide away in his brightly lit lab. Steve found him in the morning after twelve cups of coffee, jabbering about his new suit idea and a possible cure for bunions.

The night after that he couldn't even shut his eyes. He lay in bed staring at the ceiling with a light on. Finally, giving up, he dragged his exhausted body out of bed and went to his work space yet again.

Tonight was no different, unless you count the shadows that kept flitting past in the corner of his eye. Or the rustling sound he kept hearing as he walked around. He knew that it was from lack of sleep; at least he *hoped* it was.

Down stairs, he brewed his tenth cup of coffee since the afternoon. He felt an ulcer coming on with a vengeance.

*Hmmh... I wonder if my ulcer can be a new Avenger.
What an asshole he would be.*

Jesus, am I really thinking this?

His eyes blurred and he slumped against his work bench. Blinking a few times in an attempt to clear his foggy mind, he noticed the room grow darker.

"JARVIS, I told you to keep the lights up!" He yelled toward the ceiling.

His eyes close and the last thing he hears is the AI saying,
"I have not changed the lighting levels, sir."

Loki's concern was growing for Tony as the days passed. The third day after they arrived at the tower, Tony had fallen down the stairs. It was a small incident, a few bruises, but everyone could see the billionaire was losing it. He laughed too loudly, spoke too quickly, and drank copious amounts of coffee.

No one had failed to notice the screams that heralded the sound of the elevator bringing the man down to his lab.

After the screams, Loki had rushed into the hall to find him already in the elevator. The second time Tony went downstairs he just watched silently from his door, unsure of what to do.

What was the appropriate response to this?

Would Stark push him away in an attempt to keep his pride intact?

After telling him to sleep alone, how could he ask to sleep with him again...

Tonight was the final straw, watching Tony walk into his room and then leave only a half hour later. Loki decided to speak to him in the morning, if Stark would even be conscious by then.

When morning came, Loki was surprised to see Tony's door was closed. This usually meant the mortal was occupying the room. He swallowed nervously, then gave a gentle tap on the door. After waiting for a few moments, he glanced up at the ceiling.

"Jarvis, open the door."

The AI sounded reluctant to answer,
"I don't think that is a good idea, sir."

Loki raised an eyebrow,
"Please? I'm concerned for his health."

"As you wish, sir. I would like to mention that you should review my records of what transpired last night before coming to any conclusions."

With that the door opened slightly and Loki, confused, pushed it further ajar.
From the door, he could see the mess that Tony called hair peeking out from under a sheet. Loki smiled and crept closer to the bed before noticing a second lump under the covers. He stopped, one foot forward and stared as a feeling of dread filled him. As he watched, both occupants of the bed shifted and yawn, waking up.

A blond woman rose, shamelessly letting the sheet fall from her bare breast. She spotted the god standing by the bed and squeaked, pulling the sheet back up. Tony stirs again and rolled onto his back, his eyes opening.
There was a long pause before someone spoke.

"What the... *Fuck*... Is going on?" Tony groggily mumbled before sitting up. He stares at the blond woman in confusion before whipping his head around to face his lover.

"This is *absolutely* not what it looks like," he denies while jumping out of bed.

Loki stares at him. His heart and mind stopped processing since laying eyes on the woman. He wasn't functioning enough to appreciate a naked Stark in front of him. Tony doesn't look back at the blond, stepping close to touch Loki's arms gently. His voice gently sneaks into the god's mind.

"Loki, something is wrong here. I was down in my workroom last night and I think I blacked out. That's the last god damn thing I remember."

Loki slowly caught up with the situation and tore his eyes away from the confused blond. Tony was pale, his body was visibly shaking and his eyes looked dark and haunted. A twinge in his chest reminded him that there was no way Tony could have voluntarily done anything with someone after not sleeping for three nights.

He wrapped his arms around the shorter man and rested his forehead against his.
"Tony, calm yourself. I believe you. After all, your Jarvis said something about reviewing his records from last night. "

There was a slight whimper before Tony wrapped his arms tightly around him. A wave of relief washed over him at the mortal's honest physical response. Clearly, there was some sort of misunderstanding. The blond gathering her clothes on the far side of the bed noticed the two hugging.

She sneered. "What the hell is this? Are you gay? Who are you anyway? You never even told me your name."

Loki waved a hand and the girl went silent, her eyes glazing over. Tony turned and looked at her without sympathy.

"Thanks." He turned back and mumbled into the the god's chest, "Let's head downstairs first."

Jarvis, send her home if she's capable of moving."

Down in lab, Tony had several screens open at once. One showed his bedroom, another his lab, the others showed the surrounding hallways for both rooms, and the last was a view from inside the front door. The timer was at 4:02 and the Tony on screen was standing, staring at his bed. The current Tony was leaning back heavily against the taller god, trying not to pass out from stress and lack of sleep. Coffee in hand, he orders Jarvis to play.

"Anthony, you stood there for a half an hour?" Loki asked, a hint of concern in his voice. Tony shrugged and swallowed a large gulp of his 'liquid energy'.

"I have no idea, it felt like ten minutes, tops."

The Stark on screen left the room and stood swaying in the elevator. They watched nervously as he entered the lab and fiddled around for a while. Loki flinched when the Tony on screen slumped against the work bench. His voice rang out, complaining about the lights and suddenly he was on the floor.

Loki frowned as the timer continued on for a few moments.

"Jarvis, fast forward until any sign of movement." Tony spoke into his coffee cup. The video buzzed forward until the Tony on screen was suddenly standing up. He stood for a moment before walking out of the room.

"I don't remember that!"

Loki spoke sharply, "Return to the moment before you stood."

Jarvis complied without the order from Stark. The video played in slow motion. Tony on the floor. In less than a second he was standing. Tony frowned as he watched this. "That's not normal...not for *me* anyway."

Loki grew pale, his finger nails dug deep into the palms of his hands before he wrapped his arms protectively around his lover. He recalled the words of the thing yesterday.

His Tony, a puppet.

His arms tightened around Stark as they continue to watch the smaller version walk out the front door.

There was an hour between then and the next time they saw him entering, the blond in tow. She was flat out drunk, not even recognizing the billionaire beside her. There was a moment where Stark turned and looked up at the camera, a sickening grin forming on his face before they wandered off to the elevator.

Loki felt ill as his Anthony flirted with the blond.

That wasn't Anthony, that was the puppet master.

The thing had literally worn his lover's skin and went out into the world, just as it promised. They watched as the two of them reached the bedroom and proceeded to strip off clothing.

Tony suddenly spoke up. "Jarvis, stop there. Close screens."

Loki glanced down at his lover and saw the look of disgust. It was somewhat a relief to know the man felt as horrified as he did.

Tony turned around in his arms to face him. "So, apparently my body cheated on you last night. I officially want to tear my skin off and vomit like the Exorcist."

Loki let out a chuckle. "Please refrain from ripping your skin off. I like it where it is."

"I was sort of hoping you would do the ripping for me, since I'm so fucking tired." Tony's head flopped against Loki's chest. Feeling the heat from his forehead through his shirt, Loki pushed the mortal away.

Placing a hand on his forehead, he frowned. "You are feverish, Anthony."

He transported them back into Stark's bedroom and spoke again, "You need to rest; he has overworked your already abused body."

Tony wriggled uncomfortably in his arms. "Oh, not here," he said, staring at the bed with unease. "I won't sleep here...not after that."

Loki watched him with growing concern. His lover's eyes had gone wild with fear at the sight of the bed. He swallowed, and they reappeared in Loki's new room a moment later. Lifting Tony up in his arms, he gently set him down on his own wide bed.

There was a weak laugh. "I like what you've done with the place, Loks. How did you even manage to change everything to green and gold?"

Loki smiled and lay down next to Tony. "A little magic, of course."

"You seriously wasted magic on this? You could have just asked, and I would have bought you tons of green shit."

"I do what I want, Anthony."

"Tell me something I don't know," Tony snorted.

"I have been married before."

"I didn't mean literally! Jesus, it's a rhetorical question." He glared at the god.

There was no way he was going to fall asleep before *that* was explained. Loki was clearly amused by his reaction.

Oh, a little bit of revenge?

We will make you an Avenger yet, Loks.

"You were saying?" He nudged the god to continue.

"I was married a long while ago to several...beings. I have six children."

Tony sputtered. "**SIX!?**"

"Yes, although three are closer to me than the others." There was a heavy pause. "I have not seen them in many years."

"What, why not?"

He was staring at Tony as though unsure if he should speak. For a heartbeat Tony thought he might

go silent again and avoid the subject as usual.

"Odin banished them from his kingdom. He sent them far away into separate realms. Not together, but alone and cursed as monsters." A crackle of hatred filled the god's voice as he continued, "I fought for them to at least stay together, but he ordered it as my king, not as my father. I was a foolish man, then, for thinking that my 'father' knew *best*."

Tony wrapped his arms tightly around Loki. He felt ashamed that his eyes were watering at Loki's story, but he couldn't hold back the grief he felt for his lover. The loss of family struck a little too close to home for him, as a small memory of his mother surfaced.

"Loks... I'm sorry you lost your family like that. You haven't seen them since?"

Loki gazed at the mortal, who was nearly crying.

*Tony was crying for his loss, crying for him.
Why would he cry for me?*

Why would he cry for my children he has never met, and will likely never meet?

It was if the sadness of his lover woke him from a dull dream. He suddenly felt the hurt and anger that he pushed away all these years. He pushed it down, forced it out of his mind and struggled on. All the while, he knew, his children were torn from him and he forever loathed Odin for that.

All of this time, he had ignored his own suffering, his children's suffering, to make his 'family' happy. Thor had expressed his sadness by a hug and a pat on the back. He had never had children, he could never understand what it was like to lose them like that. For them to be treated as monsters unfit for love, unfit for Asgard. Frigga had been the kindest of them all; she saw how the hole torn in him filled with bitterness. She tried to keep things cheerful between Odin and himself, but something was lost that day.

Perhaps this was when it all started, the realization that Asgard was not as perfect as it seemed. When your king, *your father*, banishes your children for their 'monstrosity'. That day, Loki had awoken to a new reality and found he was no longer ignorant to the dirty underbelly of Asgard. He would never want the throne of a place that accepted such treatment as normal. He knew he would never be respected as a king, even if he rightfully earned it. His brother was accepted for all his faults, even when his reckless actions brought pain to others. He had hoped he could be the one to guide his brother away from such practices, by being kept close as an advisor. This, of course, ended poorly when Loki discovered he was a monster himself. His true being was never accepted, just as his children never were.

"Loki?"

He blinked and focused on the worried face in front of him. Stark was waiting for an answer to his question.

"I did see one of them for a short moment several years ago." Loki smiles bitterly at the memory. "My daughter, Hela, is the ruler of Hell. I had passed beyond during a... moment of weakness."

"First off, your daughter is officially cool. Secondly, A MOMENT OF WEAKNESS!?" Stark shouted, sitting up and glaring at him. Loki sat up and shrank away from Tony's anger.

He mumbled, "She was angry with me and returned me immediately to the world of the living."

Tony opened his mouth and shut it again, his body shaking with rage. Loki continued on weakly,

"I know, Anthony. *Of course* I know it was wrong. I was reckless during a battle by Thor's side, unusual for me, and I became wounded rather badly. I simply felt, *tired*. I was tired of the lifestyle. I was suffering alone with my loss, I cleaned up after my blundering brother daily, and my father had become angry about my use of magic in our battles." At this, Tony raised a questioning eyebrow, a scowl still firmly in place.

Loki, his head tucked down, mumbles, "It is considered a trait of the weak or womanly."

Tony's scowl twitched. "Well you are a little woman-"

"Stark..." Loki warned before continuing. "I lay there without healing myself. I honestly did not expect to pass so quickly. I simply wanted to feel the pain a little longer," he finished sheepishly.

There was silence while Tony glared at the god.

Sighing, Tony ran a hand through his hair. "I'm pissed because I care about you. You know that right?" Loki nodded.

"So let's hope neither of us pay her a visit any time soon. Unless, of course, we're invited."

Exhaustion started to ebb back into his body as the adrenalin from the shock wore off. He cast one more exasperated glance at his lover and fell back into the pillows.

"I just want to sleeeeeeeeep." Loki leaned forward and kissed his forehead gently. His cold lips felt excellent on Tony's feverish body.

"Sleep. I shall help you with your dreams," he said, smiling.

Tony felt his eyes close heavily as he was whisked away into pleasant dreams of Loki.

He hadn't wanted to tell them, but Loki insisted that he could use their help. Of course they laughed, well, Clint laughed.

"You sleep walked out and cheated on your brand new boyfriend? That's an all time low, Tony." He wiped his tearing eyes. "What about you, Loki, you haven't killed him yet? I figured you would already. Are you losing your touch?"

There was a flash in the air that left a knife sticking out of the wall inches away from Burton's ear. The laughter stopped abruptly and he remained quiet for the rest of the meeting.

"If you are finished finding amusement in one of your comrades being used as a puppet, I would like to ask for your assistance," Loki hissed. Guilt silenced the room.

"I can not be vigilant at all times, considering I will need to set up some security on this tower. I would hope that you could spare time to check on Anthony for any signs that he is... not himself."

Tony snapped, "I have plenty of security here and I don't need a bunch of fucking baby sitters." He was still three days overtired and trying to cut down on the coffee.

Loki simply shrugged and thought to him,

"We require a magical barrier and I would rather not find you in bed with another woman."

It was Tony's turn for guilt, he quietly answered back,

"Fine, don't rub that in my face forever though, I don't think my heart could handle it."

"I shall not, I am simply concerned." Loki frowned while glancing at the others.

"Admittedly, it hurt to see you like that."

Tony came closer and to touch his arm, causing Loki to face him again.

"What can I do to fix this?"

Loki spoke out loud, "You can get some sleep, for one thing. I will assist until you are fully asleep, but then I must set up the barrier. "

Tony blushed furiously and left the room, grumpily muttering, "Thanks. I really wanted everyone to know that I need a bed time story to sleep."

The tower was far too large to protect all of it. The lower floors were too far away for a magic barrier to cover, and that wasn't even including the basement levels. As he traveled around, following directions from the ever present 'Ceiling Servant', he made plans for the barrier. The most important area would be the penthouse and the four floors above and below it. The penthouse itself took up three floors on its own, leaving a lot of room for vulnerability. Loki would have to weave the strongest of his magic here and stretch it out. The rest of the floors would be a web of smaller spells and traps, less powerful but more plentiful.

He started in the living area of Stark's penthouse. Biting a finger to draw blood, he smeared it in a circle around his body, tracing small runes around the outside.

Anthony is going to have a fit when he sees this.

Kneeling on one knee, his hands caress the floor searching out any imperfections. Rivulets of magic spread from his fingers as he pressed one hand down firmly, the other tracing more complex runes in his blood. Ripples of green energy flowed across the floor and up the walls causing the windows to flash when the magic reached the glass. He feels for the furthest parts of the penthouse before expanding the field. The power fluctuated and weakens as he reaches the other floors. Grimacing, he reaches out for more power, and finds it.

An explosion fills his body, the green blurring into a violent blue before fading to a teal. Opening his eyes with the shock, he nearly loses the connection.

"...Anthony?"

"Yeah, babe?"

His eyes close, concentrating on knitting together a web through more of the floors.

"Aren't you sleeping? How are you lending me your power?"

"No idea, Loks. I'm floating around in a dream and you just sorta tapped in." Tony's voice sounded pleased. *"Glad I could help. How's it going?"*

Another wave of power shook his body.

"Please be more gentle, my body can not handle channeling our powers together very well."

There was a chuckle from Tony, *"I'm not even gonna' comment on that."*

Loki smirked as the final wave of magic encompasses every level of the tower in a strong web. He releases a large breath of air and withdrew from the well of magic.

"It is complete, and a lot more powerful than I expected. Do you mind if I join you? I am concerned that this drained you more than you can handle right now."

When Loki received no response he grew afraid and stood, ready to teleport into his bedroom.

A voice from behind startled him.

"I figured I would join you, since you just did all the heavy...what is *that*?"

Loki winced and turned around inside the bloody circle that Tony was clearly gesturing to. He watched as the man leaned closer to inspect the mess on his floor.

"If that's your blood I'm going to have to blow out another window for hurting yourself. Then I will yell about my floor that you ruined." His voice was light and flippant but Loki could hear the undertone of concern.

He sighed. "It's the only way to cast this spell, and it was a small price to pay for it," Loki said, running the non-bloody hand through his long black hair.

"A *SMALL* price? For one thing, this floor cost far more than the entire country of Norway. Do you think tiling is cheap? I bet you do with your big golden halls and furs." Tony still sounded somewhat amused until he spoke again, "This is no 'small' amount of blood, Loki. I don't consider this a 'small price' to pay for anything...just let me have my fit about it." He exhaled noisily and fell into a couch near by.

Loki finds himself fidgeting like a nervous child. He immediately chides himself at the immaturity of his actions and sits down next to Tony gently. The anger was fading back to the exhausted face Loki had seen earlier.

After a moment, he dared a question. "Anthony, please, why are you out of bed so soon?"

Tony did not answer, but continue to sit there, glaring out the window with his arms crossed. Loki started to fret again at the lack of response. Tony *never* stopped talking.

He must be furious!

His mind started to race to find any and all ways of making it up to his lover. Tony's voice disturbed him from his internal panic.

"I...this morning..." The voice was low and heavy with emotion. "It sort of felt like I was raped, I guess. Like some guy just had his way with me and left me there all broken inside."

Whatever Loki was about to say died in his mouth. He felt a stabbing twisting pain in his chest at those words.

Raped.

Used.

Broken.

They were all too familiar to him, and to associate them with Tony made him feel sick. All throughout the day, he had forced it out of his mind. Forced himself to just accept it. Forced out the memory of that beast's smile or the sight of Stark's weak, abused body in the morning. His jaw tensed as he fought down a scream of rage and despair. Tony hid it so well. His usual snarky façade had fooled the god completely. He felt moronic for failing to notice his own lover's pain.

"Tony..." he started, his voice hoarse with despair. "What can I do? Tell me, what can I do to help you?"

Tony looked skeptical, which hurt Loki more, feeling that his love had no faith in him. But, after a moment, a childish grin broke on Tony's once solemn face.

"Doughnuts!"

Loki blinked. "I do not...I do not know what that is, but I shall do it if it helps you."

Tony was snickering, now. "It's a food. I want food. I want doughnuts." He gestured dramatically. "Here on earth, they are the cure all for emotional trauma. This makes them precious are rare to find."

Unsure if he were joking or not, the god prepared himself mentally for the fight to get Stark 'The Doughnuts'.

All the while he watched his lover carefully for any slip in the cheerful mask he wore.

It felt good to be outside again.

Well, to be himself and outside again.

Tony felt his eye twitch and silently cursed his body. This was not going to be a big deal for him, he refused to let it be. They were taking a limo to retrieve his doughnuts. After Loki gave a heartfelt speech about the trials he was willing to go through to find them for his lover, Tony had to explain it to him. But not until he finished laughing on the floor for twenty minutes.

"Jarvis, play it again," Tony said now, and the small television screen embedded in the seat flickered on to show Loki in the penthouse. There was a huff of annoyance from beside him.

"This is the twelfth time, Anthony. You are such a child."

"Hey, I just assumed you were a pastry worshiper like your brother. I didn't know you would take it to this level." He laughed again at the sincerity of the Loki on screen. He had even dropped on one knee.

He felt a barrage of upset thoughts tumbling out of Loki beside him. Glancing over he saw his lover was more upset than he was letting on.

Huh

He's actually holding back his anger?

That's a first.

A lone thought seemed to be on repeat through the god's head. Tony focused on it and listened carefully.

I would do anything for him.

I would have...

Doughnuts.

Feh.

I would do anything to fix this.

I am responsible...

I would do anything for him..

Tony started to blush as he stared at the sulking form of Loki. After a moment the god looked up, noticing the lack of laughter.

"Anthony? You may continue to watch it, if it pleases you," Loki said, uncrossing his arms and looking defeated.

Tony launched himself across the seat and hugged him tightly. The expensive leather creaked as he wrapped his legs around the god and settled into his lap.

Loki managed to stutter,
"W-what..? What is going on?"

He thought for a moment, his head pressed into Loki's shoulder.

"I'll be fine, Loks. You don't have to let me make an ass out of you just to 'help' me." He paused, and whispered, "You're *already* helping me."

Loki's cold hands slid down Tony's back carefully. He repressed a shiver at the feeling, trying to appreciate that he could even feel it.

That something wasn't riding his body like a...

He twitched again when the driver knocked on the window to let them know of their arrival. Leaning back, he admired the god in front of him. His heart filled with affection at the concerned look in Loki's eyes, the way his hands held Tony's body in balance.

God, I love him.
Whoa, wait. Wait.
Wait.
Uh.

"Shall we go find you some *easily* obtained doughnuts, love?"

Tony blinked and remained seated on Loki's lap, his mouth gaping. At last he let out a nervous laugh and rolled away to open the door.

"Here we go, magical doughnuts to cure my soul."

A soft laugh came from behind him as they crawled out of the limo,
"Your soul is undamaged and I hardly see how a circular pastry could heal it anyway." Loki's chuckle deepened. "You seem to have an affinity for the shape, though."

Tony smacked his arm and pouts at him as they entered the store. He became his usual flippant-smart-ass self and preceded to order, yet again, obscene amounts of food.

"What of the doughnut holes? Should you not order the removed centers as well?" Loki asked, looking at the trays of little cake spheres with what looked like pity.

No doughnut left behind for Loki.

"Sure thing. Hey miss?!" Addressing the woman with the paper hat, Tony proclaimed dramatically, "My boyfriend would like all of these doughnut holes. I'm afraid he feels they're left out from our wonderful doughnut party."

The woman arched an eyebrow at the billionaire's boyfriend and went back to packing the

doughnuts. Tony thought he heard her mutter "LSD," and held back a laugh.

Loki seemed to be considerably more cheered since they entered the store. Tony formed a sneaking suspicion that Loki shares his adopted brother's pastry affections after all. Once five boxes and several bags were packed, Happy came and collected some of them to be placed in the trunk. The man had an amused smirk on his face that Tony felt earned him a box for himself.

Once back in the limo, Tony nestled into his seat and watched the god slip into the car like a cat. This wasn't the first time he mentally compared Loki to one and doubted it would be the last. He was just so lithe, his movements were always smooth and effortless.

Even when going down on one knee to declare that he would retrieve the mighty doughnuts for me.

He giggled yet again at the memory as he looked at the god's face.

He was staring at him, his face held an emotion Tony had never seen before. Loki's deep green eyes were gentle and for once his eyebrows weren't furrowed in concern or anger. He looked younger and less tense.

More human.

He reached out towards his lover and his hand was met with Loki's. Without speaking, the god drew his body closer, intertwining their fingers as Tony fell into his lap again. The kiss was gentle, the hands that fluttered across his body touched him tenderly. He felt as if he were being embraced by a warm cloud.

When they broke the kiss, he took in a deep breath. He opened his eyes and looked into Loki's green ones steadily.

"Thank you."

There wasn't a single twitch or shiver of fear left in him.

For Richer or For Poorer

Chapter Summary

Pepper and Tony have a talk.
Loki and Tony have a talk.
No one talks about the crisis.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: HEAVY SMUT/ NSFW

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

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See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

For Richer or For Poorer

(Chapter 15)

Tony was sitting, glaring at the bar in front of him. He breezed through the initial withdrawal with no problem; hardly even a headache. He had his suspicions that a certain god had a hand in that. Now he just needed to deal with stress without drinking. Especially when he was royally pissed off. Like right now.

"Tell me again, why I can't leave *my* tower?" he growled.

Loki shook his head elegantly. "You know why you cannot leave. It is outside the barrier and we already risked it once with your doughnut adventure."

Groaning, Tony crossed his arms protectively over his stomach. "Please, god, do not *ever* mention doughnuts in my presence again," He winced at the memory and turned serious.

"How, exactly, am I suppose to do either of my jobs if I'm locked up in here?"

Loki looked thoughtful for a while before he spoke,

"As for the Avengers, there are more than enough of them to go around. For your business, you could call your servant?"

"My *who*? We don't have servants here anymore, Lokes. Get with the times."

Loki scoffed. "As I can see, your entire society is run on servants. The woman who slaved to give us your doughnuts or your many robots, for example," he paused,

"I mean the blond woman, Mrs. Smith?"

Tony's jaw dropped. "She is *NOT* a servant! She's my friend! She manages my entire company!"

Loki simply raised an eyebrow before disappearing from sight. Tony threw one of the decorative pillows, that Pepper had made him buy, at the space that once seated the god. Fine, he would call her. They needed to chat about some other stuff anyway.

"Tony!" chirruped Pepper as she walked into the living room. Tony felt a familiar ache as he watched her come closer, as beautiful as ever.

He smiled and opened his arms to offer a hug. "Hey there, Peps. Thanks for coming to me, seeing as I can't leave to see you."

Returning his hug, she smiled warmly and settled into one of the bar stools at the counter. He slid a mug of coffee across the counter to her.

Eagerly accepting the drink, Pepper took a sip. "You're welcome, Tony, and thanks for the coffee. I'm still jet lagged from my previous trip." Tony chuckled nervously and looked down at his hands, unsure of where to start.

She spoke up first, "Tony, I know you don't want to talk about business so how about you just spit it out?" Tony snorted and leaned forward on the counter, his hands wrapped firmly around the coffee cup. The heat turned swiftly into pain, drawing him out of his thoughts.

"I knew about him before I went through the portal." he said, speaking down into his cup. He could see her tense across the counter from him. After a moment she let out a long sigh and took a much larger sip of her drink.

"I didn't mean for it to happen," she responded quietly, "Of course it wasn't on purpose. I just happened to meet him on one of the trips for the company." Tony watched her carefully, and found he wasn't all that sad about this.

I guess I got over it a while ago.

She cleared her throat and glanced at him. "He was just so...*normal*. We could go out for coffee and not be swamped by fans or reporters. He had time to bring me to concerts. He remembers things about me from when we first met."

Tony flinched. "I'm sorry about that, I'll always remember how I couldn't remember things. How ridiculous is that?" he said with a sad chuckle.

Pepper smiled weakly at him and asked, "Tony, how long did you know? Why didn't you say anything?"

His smile fell as he looked out the windows at the city, his view was now tinted teal from the

magic barrier. He knew nearly a month after the two of them first met. He had a gut feeling and looked into who she was meeting from the company. Of course he noticed the guy, they met for coffee five times in the first week of working together.

Pepper never does anything unnecessary.

"I knew pretty much since the beginning," he turned to face her again, "I didn't say anything because I wanted to hear it from you. We were still friends, even if we were failing as lovers. I trusted you to say something when you felt it was time. It's not your fault I went and disappeared before you could."

Her eyes filled with tears as he spoke. "Oh Tony... I am *so* sorry. I would have said something sooner if we hadn't been such good friends," she paused to wipe her eyes, "I was afraid we would lose that after you knew. So I just kept debating and putting it off, much to his annoyance."

Tony laughed. "Poor guy, he must have felt weird being in competition with me."

Raising an eyebrow, Pepper scoffed. "You weren't much of a threat to him other than you could fire him. He could tell we were better as friends than lovers."

Tony felt a small prang of pain at her words but smiled and nodded anyway. It was true, after all, that they had been good friends for a lot longer. His attention was caught as she raised her mug.

"To things working out in the long run. I found someone and you found someone."

They bumped mugs together and she chuckled.

"Albeit, your relationship is a lot more complicated than mine. I suspect that's just the way it has to be with you."

Tony smirked. "Complicated? It's not that complicated."

"So how was your little meeting?" Loki asked as he tried to keep the disgust out of his voice. He apparently failed.

"Why do you care so much? What's wrong, Lokes?"

Tony was seated in the same place as earlier, this time lounging with a magazine. Loki reappeared a few hours after Pepper had left and had waited in a chair for Tony to acknowledge him. Her scent still filled the room, making Loki feel nauseous. He had listened in from the room above them as they spoke. It was a waste of magic but he wanted to know Tony's feelings towards the woman. He had not expected to hear she was cheating on him before. His already low opinion of her dropped to utter disgust.

His lip curled at the memory of her words.

"I simply wish to know what the *whore* wanted from you."

Tony sat up, startled. "*EXCUSE* me?! You did not just call Pepper a 'whore'," He stared at the god in disbelief, "Wait just a fucking minute...were you listening in to our conversation?!"

Loki could no longer reign in his anger. He exploded,

"Yes, alright, I was listening in! What do you think I heard? Oh, that she was unfaithful to you for quite some time and that you foolishly let her take advantage of you!"

Tony threw the magazine to the floor. Standing up abruptly, he pushed his way into Loki's face.

"She. Is. Not. A. *WHORE*!" His eyes narrowed, "For one thing, she had every right to fall in love with someone else. If anyone should be called a whore, it's me. I was always flirting with women, even if it was harmless fun, it was still bad. I gave her plenty of fucking reasons to leave me. For

another, it's none of your *god-damned* business what either of us did. "

Loki hissed,

"She was the one who took it past flirtation. She didn't leave you, she was unfaithful. There is a difference. Letting you live with this knowledge while she went off and slept around with someone else?" He smirked,

"In Asgard, one who does this is known as a *Whore*."

Tony's face was shoved into his in less time then the god thought possible, his hands curled into fists around Loki's collar.

Loki snarled, "Gera þú hafa a vandamál?"

The mortal was panting in anger. "You *do not* call my best friend a whore. You know nothing about her and you know nothing about me. I made the fucking choice to let her go. I was the one who should have spoken up when I found out." his anger slowly eased, "But I couldn't. I still wanted her whenever I could have her. I thought that she would just leave me once it was really over. I can't...I couldn't handle another person leaving my life."

Loki strengthened up and glared at the man in front of him. "I know you well enough. You're a fool for clinging to someone who was hurting you."

Tony growled, "I've been clinging to you and you haven't exactly been *gentle*."

"*I WOULD NEVER DO THAT TO YOU!*" He screamed as Tony flinched back in surprise. The man's eyes widened and he unclenched his fists, letting them drop to his sides. There was a heavy silence as Loki's words seemed to echo throughout the room.

The god looked away, feeling a prickle of frustrated tears. He refused to give Stark the satisfaction of seeing him cry again.

That idiotic man.

Foolish, moronic, useless mortal.

"I know."

Loki twitched and looked back at Stark. "What?"

Tony smiled sadly and repeated, "I know you wouldn't."

Loki stared at him for a long while, trying to gage his mood. He still felt angry, but Tony's trust in him made everything feel less important. Who cared about some woman in his past? It was in the past, right? Loki lifted his eyes and gazed questioningly into the golden brown ones. He closed the gap between them in a second, roughly tilting Stark's head up to kiss him.

Tony let out an appreciative moan and pushed his tongue into the god's mouth. Pressing his body closer, Loki fought for dominance with his tongue. His hands found their way under the back of Tony's shirt, fingers tracing up his muscular back. Loki felt the mortal shiver from his touch and smiled against Stark's lips.

They broke the kiss panting, both attempting to catch their breaths.

Loki purred,

"Forgive my anger?"

Tony snorted and snuck a hand down to squeeze Loki's butt. "Actions speak louder than words."

Chuckling, Loki pushed Stark back into the couch. "So I've heard. Looks like I have a lot of work ahead of me."

Tony laughed as he leaned back against the cushions. Loki surprised him by tipping him over onto his back and leaning down.

"Shall I start sooner than later?"

A furious blush crept over Tony's face as the god kissed him again, more passionately. He slipped his hands under Stark's shirt again, this time pulling it up. Their lips separated as he pulled the shirt over Tony's head.

"Whoa, Lokes, anyone could come in," Tony protested half heartedly.

Loki smirked and started placing gentle kisses across Tony's bare chest.

"I. Do. Not. Care."

Tony gasped quietly and immediately stopped complaining.

The god hovered over the reactor for a moment, his eyes glowing blue from the light. He pressed his lips to the cool circlet in a slow, loving kiss. Tony hissed with pleasure and arched his back a little in response.

"O-okay. No one has ever done that before," Tony mumbled breathlessly.

Loki chuckled and continued his trail of kisses back up Stark's neck, stopping at one point to bite down just below his ear. Tony's shuddering groan fanned the heat that was spreading throughout Loki's body.

His lips found Stark's yet again, curling their tongues together furiously. Tony's hands started exploring the god's body slowly as they kissed. His desire to feel more of Tony's skin became maddening.

Loki broke the kiss and sat up, his legs straddling Tony's waist. Instead of simply casting his clothes off with magic, he decided to give Tony a show.

Looking up at the god, Tony couldn't decide where to rest his eyes. Everything looked so delicious to him. His gaze followed Loki's hands as he started undoing the clasps on his shirt, his eyes still focused directly on Tony's.

I've never had a sexier striptease in my life.

He's fucking straddling me while sitting there undoing a million buckle thingies.

He wriggled his body under the weight of Loki, the stirring in his groin growing under Loki's gaze. Once the final clasp was loose, Loki slipped the tunic off of him like he was shedding skin. Tony couldn't hold back an appreciative moan at the performance. The god shifted his hips slightly, causing another twitch down there, and slowly lifted his under shirt over his head. Tony's eyes traveled down Loki's pale chest as he let out a whistle. The god's torso was surprisingly long and muscular. Normally hidden under many layers of leather, it was an illusion that the god was thin and boney.

Well, some parts of him were boney.

Loki chuckled, "I *heard* that, Anthony," and leaned down again to kiss him deeply. Their skin touched, sending sparks of electricity throughout their bodies. Tony bucked his hips against the god's gently, his body aching to feel more of Loki.

Loki could no longer bite his tongue and let out a low moan. He could feel how hard Tony was as he ground his waist up into his own.

This man has no patience.

Not that I should talk, I am going mad.

Tony let out a breathless laugh. " I *heard* that."

Loki flushed and raised an eyebrow.

"Strange, You weren't supposed to."

"Maybe we're lacking in," another thrust of Tony's hips, "concentration."

Loki moaned again and pushed himself up to look down at the mortal's body below him. It was a stunning sight, Tony's tanned skin rippling over a muscular frame. Not that Tony left much to the imagination, with all his tight fitting shirts; It was still a pleasure to see it bare and feel the heat of his skin.

"I cannot be patient any longer." He said as he flicked a wrist, casting away their lower garments. Tony flinched and gasped as the cold air hit his already throbbing member. Loki smirked and gently rubbed his groin against Stark's, letting the man feel how hot and excited he was.

Revenge for that thrust earlier.

Tony shuddered beneath him and stuttered, " I- I heard t-that."

Loki smirked and slipped a hand down, wrapping his fingers around Tony's cock gently.

"Shhh.."

Tony whimpered, "Loookiiii," as the god wrapped his long fingers around him.

Ohgodohgod and that's just his fucking HAND!

Loki chuckled above him and leaned down close again, the hand ever so slightly squeezing his cock. Tony grunted in pleasant surprise and pulled the god's head down, crushing his lips against Loki's. The kiss grew more passionate as the god started to slowly stroke Tony, sending pleasant shivers down his body. He groaned into Loki's mouth and heard the god moan in response. Tony whined when Loki broke the kiss too soon. There was another chuckle before the god sat up again, still gently stroking his hand down Tony's throbbing hard-on. He watched in awe as Loki slid the fingers of his other hand into his mouth and sucked on them. His cock twitched eagerly at the sight, another low groan escaping him.

"That is *way* too hot," he mumbled, his voice husky with desire. He watched as the god slipped his fingers past swollen lips and leaned forward again.

"This will feel a little odd, I am assuming it has been a long while," The god muttered with a hint of concern. Tony simply nodded, unable to find the words to respond with. His breath caught in his throat when he felt a single warm finger slip inside of him. Tony's body twitched dramatically, his groaning grew louder. It was as uncomfortable as he expected, but he knew better and forced himself to relax.

Loki smirked and leaned his face down to Tony's, thinking to him,

"Well that answers some questions."

Tony rolled his eyes and lifted his head up, gently biting down on the god's neck. He was rewarded with Loki shuddering harshly and gasping, " AH! Tony..."

Loki felt a wave of pleasure as Tony covered his neck with small bites. He bent the inserted finger slowly, starting to stretch Tony out enough to enter him. The man below him was starting to pant,

every so often whimpering Loki's name. Every inch of skin that touched felt charged with electricity. There was something about Tony that drove his own body mad with excitement. He slipped another finger in, causing Tony to arch his back and whimper with pleasure again.

Tony groaned. "Do it, Lokes. I can't wait anymore!"

Loki raised an eyebrow. "Do *what*, exactly?" His fingers did a scissoring motion inside Tony. The man nearly screamed with pleasure, his body writhing beneath Loki's.

Tony whimpered louder, "Please, I *want* you. I *need* more of you." Loki shivered at his words, enjoying Tony's whiny begging a bit longer.

"I don't know what you're asking for, *Annnnthhoony*." He purred.

Tony grumbled and glared up at him. "Fuck me, Lokes. Now."

Loki chuckled once more and slipped his fingers out of Tony.

"Well, since you asked so *nicely*..."

Taking Tony's legs, he lifted them up to rest against his shoulders. He admired the view before leaning forward slightly to press his cock gently against Tony's entrance.

He felt Tony shudder in anticipation and took a moment to look wonderingly at Tony. Their eyes met and Loki smiled at the dazed, hungry look in his lover's eyes.

Still gazing into the brown eyes below him, he pressed into Tony slowly.

Without tearing his gaze from Loki's, Tony shuddered as the tip of the god's cock entered him.

He's such a fucking tease.

He groaned as it slipped into him deeper, still staring into the god's vibrant green eyes. There was a pause before Loki suddenly thrust the full length of his member into him. It was finally too much for him and he closed his eyes, a loud moan escaping him.

Oh fuck that's long.

Thank god it's not as wide as it's long.

"Anthony, are you alright?" Loki asked from above him. Tony laughed gently, opening his eyes and smiling up at him. "Babe, I'm amazing. You're amazing."

Loki looked surprised before a warm smile grew on his face. Giving a small chuckle, he drew his hips back and thrust in more roughly.

Tony snapped his head back, his mouth open in a silent scream. As Loki started thrusting into him at a slow even pace, Tony's raised his hips to meet the god's.

Panting, he looked up at the god above him. "Oh fuck...*Loki*!"

Loki's face was tense with passion. His eyebrows were drawn together, his mouth open with soft gasps of pleasure escaping his lips. Their eyes met again and Loki suddenly quickened the pace.

"Mmn, *Annnthonny*," moaned Loki, his name being drawn out into a pleased purr. He loved hearing Loki moan his name as though he hungered for Tony.

Loki slipped his arms around Tony's middle, drawing the mortal up into a half sitting position.

Tilting his hips, he started to thrust again, harder.

The reaction was immediate; Tony screamed.

That seems to be the place.

Aiming now for the most sensitive spot, Loki whimpered out Tony's name. Their eyes met again, glazed with passion. Tony's face looked flushed covered with sweat, his mouth open and panting in short bursts.

Their lips met, a passionate kiss jarred by Loki's rough thrusts. Then he felt it, a familiar coil of tension building inside of him. Reaching down with one hand, Loki grasped Tony's twitching cock and started to pump him in time with his thrusts.

Tony groaned deeply.
"Ahh shit! I'm gonna' cum if you do that."

Loki smirked. "That is exactly what I want you to *do*." He bucked roughly into him as he felt the tension build. Tony screamed and shuddered, cumming hard in Loki's hand. He rode out the orgasm and Loki grunted, giving the final deep thrust as he came inside of Tony soon after.

They stayed seated with their bodies still pressed close, looking at one another lovingly as they caught their breath. Loki smiled, gently laying Tony down and removing himself. Tony shuddered and continued to stare up at him. He shifted over, making enough room for the god to lay beside him on the couch. Loki chuckled and lay down carefully, still panting quietly.

"Angry sex, huh? Why can't we be normal?" Tony asked, chuckling as his body started to cool. Loki smirked and wrapped an arm around him, his heart beat beginning to slow to its normal pace. "I am a god and you, a mortal. We are anything but normal."

"Oh yeah, I forgot, you're an alien god" Tony snorted.

Loki rolled his eyes and responded,
"Oh yes, and you are a billionaire, playboy, philanthropist ."

"You forgot ' Genius'. You must be losing your memory, *old man*, Frosty, Gonzo." Tony smirked and rested his head on his arm.

Loki smirked back and raised an eyebrow.
"Indeed, I am old. You ,however, are Gimli, the *dwarf*."

Tony stared at him in awe,
"You...You made a funny! You made a culture reference thingy!"
His eyes widened further,
"How do you even *know* who Gimli is?"

Loki chuckled and kissed Stark's lips gently ,
"Your archer felt the need to explain 'The Lord of the Rings' to my brother. I, unfortunately, had the luxury of sitting through Thor's explanation of it."

"I don't know if I should feel happy, or pissed off at being called a dwarf. To be honest, I'm sorta' turned on again." Tony laughed when Loki swatted his thigh. Nuzzling closer Loki sighed contently, breathing in the scent of Tony.

"Hey, don't get comfy. We should move to a bed before someone walks in to see my perfect bare ass hanging off the couch." Tony said, poking Loki in the belly. Loki grumbled sleepily and suddenly they were in his bed, one floor up.

Snuggling in further, Loki mumbled, " Are you angry, still?" Hearing a huff of laughter, he looked up to see Tony smiling.

"Are you?" he asked in return. Loki shook his head and watched Stark smile wider, his eyes slowly closing. "No, Lokes, i'm not angry anymore."

Chapter End Notes

Please review, let me know your thoughts.

I know there's a lot of "s"s where there should be "ed"s. I will be going back over these asap.

In Your Eyes

Chapter Summary

Fury had a secret.
That is, until Tony did a little digging around.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Violence/ graphic imagery

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

[Disclaimer: I do not, in anyway, own these characters. All rights belong to Marvel etc.]

In Your Eyes

(Chapter 16)

Loki already regretted it. Listening to Stark was like listening to his brother. They always make any plan sound smooth. That is, until the Bilgesnipe were stampeding around them after a well placed poke from Thor. He should have known better, right?

"Pleasetell me, *again*, why I am going to 'train' with you?" he asked, rolling his eyes.

Rogers smiled with pride. "You were the one bad guy we had the most trouble beating. I think a little training with you could help us out."

Loki sneered and cast a look at Bruce. "*You* did not best me, I'm afraid my loss was due to someone much larger and greener. If you can even count that as a loss." Bruce simply shrugged and sat down at the edge of the training room. Barton was leaning against the wall chatting with his red-headed counterpart. They seemed to have gathered to watch the show. Loki frowned at his lover's absence, but was glad, at least, that Tony was finding a healthy interest in his projects again.

Tony could hear the chatter of his friends from his lab nearby. His usual loud music was off today, just in case something decided to possess him. He didn't want his body to wander off without

anyone noticing due to what Loki called 'excessive noise'.

Ever since last night, he had a thought eating away at him. Actually, he had several thoughts, most of them centering on Loki's naked body above his. This one was something he couldn't quite place and so he had ended up asking Thor for help that morning.

"My brother's eyes have always been green. Why do you ask, Tony?"

Tony sighed and asked, "Were they green when he fought you here?" Thor looked thoughtful as he frowned in concentration. Tony groaned. Thor shouldn't have to think this hard about it.

The thunder god looked up sadly. "I honestly cannot answer this. I was too caught up in the battle and suffering...emotionally."

"Okay, big guy, don't break your brain. I'll just review some footage; do a little rooting around."

Thor continued to frown at him. "You think my brother was lying about being controlled?"

Tony blinked at him and laughed. "What? No, actually, I think he was definitely being controlled by Thanos. I just...I think his eyes might have been blue?"

"Would it matter if they were or not?"

It was Tony's turn to frown. Loki's snakiness seemed to be rubbing off on his brother. "*Actually*, it might. Not in the way you think, though. Look," he said, patting the god's shoulder, "I'll look into it and let you know what it means. Okay?"

He had made his way down to the lab after suggesting to Captain Sparkle to train with Loki. Now alone with his thoughts, Tony grumbled at the footage he collected from the tower. It wasn't enough to compare and draw a conclusion from. Ever since the dark haired god had leaned down and kissed his reactor, he couldn't get his mind off the image. The blue light reflected in Loki's eyes seemed wrong but familiar.

"Jarvis, let's get that footage from the original lab when Loki first appeared through the Tesseract."

"Right away, sir."

Several folders flicked past on the screen before a password was required. Tony waited a second before Jarvis easily hacked it. With a smirk, he tuned back into the noise from the training room next door.

"Come on Steve, do it for America!"

Rogers spared a moment to glare at Clint, "Shut up, Barton! You're *not* helping." Ducking a moment later, he managed to avoid a blow from Loki. The god snickered at the super human who was avoiding all of his attacks. The man had started out confident but soon got confused. Loki promised to not use magic while they trained, simply to keep things interesting. He never promised to go easy on him.

"I am waiting for some sort of attack, Captain." Another snicker, this time from Natasha. Steve growled and dove forward, rolling to the side before quickly kicking out Loki's legs. The god easily maneuvered away, using much less energy than the soldier. An arm lashed out and caught Steve in the shoulder. The Captain fell backwards and seconds later Loki's foot paused just above his neck.

"Do you yield?" he asked, a smirk firmly in place. Steve grimaced, his body already covered with sweat whereas the god simply looked bored.

Grumbling he put his hands up. "I give up. You're *way* too fast for me."

Loki helped the man up. "That is nonsense, you could easily match my speed with a few lessons. Well, *almost* match my speed," he chuckled.

Rogers raised an eyebrow. "If I didn't know it, I would say you are encouraging me."

Loki snorted and rolled his shoulders to stretch. "You should see my brother and I train."

Tony stood, one hand cupping his chin as he watched the footage for the twentieth time. There was no doubt about it, Loki's eyes had been blue for most of his time on earth. There were only two instances where they seemed to revert to green. One was when they had caught him outside the hall in Germany before he started the whole mayhem thing. He was, apparently, gazing at a statue before walking into the hall. The footage was crap and he could barely make it out, but there was a definite shift in color as the god stared at the bronze sculpture of some guy with a lion head. The second time Loki's eyes had gone green was when the two of them exchanged witty banter. Right before he threw Tony out a window.

Good times.

He watched and re-watched that footage a dozen times. He tried slow motion, no audio, only audio, filters, and lastly he just stared into the green eyes on screen. One second they were blue, the next they were melting into green. He could see a hint of confusion in the god's eyes, as though he didn't know what was going on.

"Jarvis, can you pin point *exactly* where the first hint of green comes in?" He watched closely as the video reversed to a point and pauses.

"Right there, sir."

Tony frowned. "What were we talking about at the moment?"

"You were telling him there was no throne for him, sir."

Tony's eyebrows arched in surprise, his hand going to scratch his beard.

Interesting.

Loki laughed loudly as he cast an appreciative look at the red head he was now sparring with. This seemed to catch her off guard, so he used it to take her down.

She landed heavily on her back with a grunt and glared up at him. "Did you just laugh to put me off?"

Loki continued to chuckle before helping her up. "I would not do that on purpose. I was simply amused that you put up a better fight than the Captain."

Natasha's eyes narrowed, "Why, because I'm a *woman*?"

Loki snickered and leaned closer to her, mumbling, "Hardly, I come from a world of warrior women. It is amusing because he was engineered to be a more powerful soldier, while you were simply born with talent."

Natasha attempted to hold in her laughter and failed. Leaving to join Clint on the side of the room, she looked satisfied.

Loki scanned the room. "Anyone else? Captain, wish to try again?"

Tony was scribbling on one of the tablets for a while before he spoke. "Jarvis, you said before that SHIELD viewed all my files from the tower?"

"Yes, sir. They viewed and took notes on all footage from Loki's arrival to his departure."

Tony frowned at the 'departure' and tapped his pen. "Any chance I can see these notes?"

"Of course sir, you have already downloaded Director Fury's logs."

Tony grinned. "Bring em' up. Focus on key words 'color, control, blue, Tesseract' and show me." His grin turned into a grimace as 180 files showed up. Running a hand through his hair, he sighed. "Okay, take out 'Tesseract'."

Five files remained on screen and opened to show their contents. Tony glanced through the first two files from earlier dates before stopping on the third. There on screen it read, "Loki Laufeyson has been noted to have blue eyes. Although they are not the same as Agent Barton's, it is apparent the god is under control of the Tesseract and/or the staff from the apparent Thanos."

Tony stared at the date in disbelief. It was a week before the incident in Germany. Just around the same time Coulson came to him with the files on the Avengers.

"That mother fucker *knew*..."

Loki was sparring with Rogers again when a loud crash echoed from the lab. They glanced at one another before hurrying over to inspect the noise.

Fearing that Tony had been turned into a puppet, Loki hung back slightly. What if, somehow, the monster had made it through the barrier? Once the door was reached, the two agents stood on either side and gestured for the others to go in first. Loki frowned and entered the room.

"Anthony, are you alright?" he asked, glancing around the room nervously. He spotted the shorter man near his work bench, a pile of metal and sparking wires at his feet. Tony was panting and glaring down at the mess before he noticed Loki.

"Lokes... I'm fine. Just pissed off."

"Jesus, Tony! We thought you were wiggling out under that *thing's* control," Clint grumbled, stepping into the room.

Tony snarled in response, "Yeah, speaking of *control*," his voice became cold, "Did you two Wonder Twins know Loki was under Thanos' control before we came back from our epic space journey? How about sometime before Germany?"

Clint paused as his eyebrows went up in confusion. Natasha had snuck into the room while Tony spoke and was reading the information on the screens. Her eyebrows furrowed as she reached the same document that Stark had been reading.

"You *must* be joking," she muttered.

Tony continued to glare at them. "You're telling me *you* didn't know? Fury sure as hell knew."

Romanoff sighed and looked at Tony with an expression one would give an idiot child. "Contrary to popular belief, Clint and I are not always kept in the loop. Trust me," she glanced at the screens, her lips pressed together in anger, "if we had known, things would have been different."

Loki scoffed, causing everyone to look at him. He raised an eyebrow and gestured to the screen. "I doubt you would have had a choice. It seems Fury made his choice *everyone's* choice."

Clint snorted. "Well, as you already know, we don't always follow Fury. In fact, we don't follow him at all anymore because of you."

Bruce stood awkwardly by the door and raised a hand to get everyone's attention.

"Hey, while we're on that subject, has anyone been contacted by SHIELD since we stormed out? No spies, no hidden cameras?"

There was a round of shrugs across the room. Tony muttered something about SHIELD being unable to spy on a shoe.

Clint shook his head. "I've been out canvassing for a week. It looks like they're backing off for now." He stretched and wandered off to the training room again. Natasha raised her eyebrows and nodded to the door at the other two. They left sheepishly, muttering about training.

Once they were alone, Loki spoke, "Anthony..."

Tony hissed and kicked a spare gauntlet across the room. "That slimy bag of dicks! "

"Tony! It's alright, even if you knew you would have-"

Tony rounded on the god and shouted, "Even if I *knew*?! No, you know what? Even if we weren't some sort of soul mates I would be pissed off! There's a wrong and there's a right. We weren't ordered to go after Barton with an 'aim to kill' order."

Loki was painfully silent. He had not wanted to bring the subject up or even be reminded of it. He argued internally before giving up and muttering quietly, "After Agent Coulson, I do not think any of you were so willing to assist me instead of killing me."

Tony froze where he stood, his heart fluttering painfully as he saw guilt and self loathing filling the god's eyes. "Lokes, even then I know I would still..." He sighed and looked down at the mess on the floor.

I was so angry about Phil...

If I had known he was being controlled, would I have felt any different?

I forgave him pretty fast as it is.

One day in a cave and I'm all over it.

He snorted. "I would have helped you. I can't say the others would have been right on board but I would have helped regardless of what they thought."

Loki looked skeptical as he walked over and gestured to the mess, sending it back up to the table. "Tony, I know what I did while I was under control. I wasn't like you, this creature and its mindless puppetry. I had thoughts and emotions, albeit exaggerated by the magic. You know," he continued, moving closer and looking down at Tony with sad eyes, "that I am not a good person. "

Watching his green eyes carefully, Tony asked, "Did you *want* to kill Phil Coulson?"

"*No*. I had no particular reason or desire to. It just... happened "

"Then it's fine." Loki shifted uncomfortably before Tony wrapped his arms around him. The god eyed him doubtfully as he continued, "It's fine to *me*, Loki. I thought you did your research on me when you came here?"

Loki blinked and rested his arms on Tony's shoulders. He looked thoughtful for a moment. "I fail to see the relevance."

Tony nuzzled his head into the god's chest. It wasn't something he could easily talk about. Maybe talking to another accidental mass murder would be easier?

" 'Merchant of Death'. It has a good ring to it, much more heavy metal than say 'Merchant of Applesauce'." He paused, waiting for his invisible audience to laugh.

"That's what people called me. Not the applesauce, death."

Loki's voice sounded bored, "Please move on from this applesauce."

"Don't hate on it! It's a wondrous human invention that-"

Loki interrupted less gently, "*Enough!* Continue with what you were saying."

Loki moved to push Tony back but he clung to him, hiding his face in the god's chest before he continued. "It's hard to talk about, okay? My company wasn't always gung-ho about clean energy. Originally, it was a weapons company. I just sorta' followed in my father's footsteps and ended up building a massive empire."

He paused, feeling a familiar rush of adrenaline as his memories crept back in.

"Well, it took one of my own missiles to go off right next to me to realize I was a 'baddy'. I know I'm supposed to be a genius, but I just didn't get it at the time. I was completely blind to what was going on in my company. My *own* weapons were being sold to the enemy, who were now killing soldiers from my *own* country. I sold weapons to U.S soldiers who went over and blew up foreign cities. I know who gets the brunt of war in their backyards, civilians." He shifted and tilted his head back to look at Loki.

"I was giving a bunch of boys some really fantastic toys to go kill one another. All the while trampling over innocent people's lives. To be honest, I'm ashamed that my first thoughts were anger and disgust that my 'enemy' had my weapons." He stopped and laughed nastily. " That's a lie, my first thought was 'ow'!"

Loki looked concerned. "You were harmed?"

Tony laughed less bitterly, and tapped the reactor in his chest. "That's where this little baby came from. My chest was filled with shrapnel and they hooked me up to a car battery."

Tony felt Loki's body tense as his face grew dark.

"I had to keep the shrapnel out of my heart while my captors demanded I build them the fancy missile I was showing off earlier. I wasn't alone though...I had a friend there," he swallowed the lump that grew in his throat. " He was brave and helped me build my first Iron Man suit so we could escape. Of course, because life is a *cold bitch*, he didn't survive long enough to celebrate our freedom. "

Loki's tension eased out of his body, a dull sadness filling him instead. He could see the torment his lover was in as he told the story. Tightening his arms around the man, he asked, "You feel responsible for his passing?"

Tony smiled weakly and nuzzled his face back into Loki's chest. "Hell yeah, I do. He wouldn't have even been there if it wasn't for me. If there is one good thing that came from his death, it's that it changed me. It always takes the death of a good man to make us gray-area boys get angry."

Loki frowned and rested his chin on top of Tony's brown locks. He wasn't sure of the intended purpose of Tony's story, but he felt worse than before. He never knew the details of what happened when Stark became Iron Man. Knowing them now, he understood the guilt he carried around inside behind his cheerful facade.

Oh, the nightmares.

Several nights they had spent together where Tony's mind had taken control of the shared dream. In them he sent them into some vehicle somewhere dry and hot. Tony always screamed and waved at the soldiers sitting around him to no prevail. Explosions and yelling surrounded them. He would watch as his lover lay in the dust as blood blossomed over his chest. He carefully drew him from those dreams into a happy memory of his own design. They would spend the rest of the night peacefully before waking up, both left with an aching memory of the nightmare.

Tony leaned away from him suddenly and looked up. "Lokes, I think what I'm trying to say is... For all our brains, we are a couple of *idiots*. We got played, man. We got *used*, chewed up and spit out. Now here we are with another asshole who thinks he can play the same game? I don't fucking think so. I'm done being controlled. It's time to initiate our own attack."

Loki stares at him for a moment before a bubble of laughter escaped him. He smiled lovingly at his determined boyfriend before kissing Tony's forehead. "Then, we shall be victorious."

A strong gust of wind shook the tower as rain threw itself relentlessly against the dark windows. The storm had come in sometime during everyone's stay downstairs and still lingered over the city several hours after. Thunder roared seconds after a series of blinding flashes struck some of the taller buildings around them. Tony chewed thoughtfully on his pen as his other hand slid through the raven-black hair of his lover. It was hard not to notice the amount of lightning around the tower.

Thor is probably having a nightmare about the end of Poptarts.

"Comfy, Lokes?" he asked, glancing down at the god. Loki was stretched out the entire length of the couch with his head resting on Tony's lap. Apparently, emotional battles were heavier strains on his system than physical ones.

"Yes," he answered quietly, keeping his eyes closed.

Tony smiled and continued chewing on what was left of the pen hanging out of his mouth. His fingers danced in the air, tracing points and lines on the hologram in front of him. When his other hand reached the end of Loki's long black hair, he started from the top. The god's hair was surprisingly soft, considering how greasy it had been when this whole thing started. He discovered that he gained an irrational amount of pleasure from touching it and apparently Loki liked it too.

Muttering, he flicked something off across the room in the hologram.

Loki made a sound between a purr and a content groan.

Tony chuckled. "You're such a cat. Bruce was only half off about you and your bag of cats."

Loki growled and nuzzled his face into Stark's leg. "Did I not warn you about using that phrase?"

"Man, what do you have against cats? Were you beat up by a man in a Hello Kitty costume when you were a kid?"

Loki scoffed and rolled onto his back, now facing up to sneer at Stark. "I adore cats. I simply dislike being compared to a *sack* of them. Humans tend to place kittens in a sack with the intention of drowning them."

Tony raised an eyebrow and looked down at the irritated face. "Well aren't you a morbid little Muppet? "

"It is not I who came up with the horrendous process." Loki frowned and closed his eyes again.

Tony settled with petting the god's cheek now that his hair was no longer accessible.

"Hey, speaking of cats...what was it that caught your attention in Germany? That naked guy with a lion head? You looked like you came back to yourself when you saw it."

Tony continued to mess with the hologram for a while before giving up on work to look back down at Loki.

The god appeared to be thinking. A moment later, his eyebrows went up without opening his eyes.

"Hmm, You mean the statue?"

Tony nodded and waited for an explanation before realizing Loki couldn't see him, "Yeah." His fingers continued to caress the god's cheek.

"The statute is of Don Ottevio. He is a character from the opera 'Don Giovanni'," he paused and opened his eyes again." It was the first and only opera I saw on my visits to Midgard."

"Wait, when was this?" Tony asked.

"1787, I believe." Chuckling at Tony's look of surprise, he continued, "I was on a visit with Thor. As usual, he spent most of the time in pubs making friends and celebrating with mortal maidens."

Tony laughed. "Uh oh, don't tell Jane about this."

"It was 226 years ago by your standards, Anthony. I doubt she would care."

Jarvis suddenly interrupted. "My apologies sir, but I think you should see this immediately."

Tony smirked at the god's obvious annoyance at the interruption. "Go for it, Jarv."

A screen appeared, showing screaming people and a small explosion. The announcer was explaining that a city in Rhode Island seemed to be under attack.

Tony frowned as he squinted at the screens. "Shit, I recognize that bastard. Jarvis, call everyone right now." Small icons of the Avengers appeared on screen simultaneously. Most of the pictures were from odd angles or taken when someone was sneezing. Tony liked to update them every month to something more embarrassing. Natasha picked up first, the video feed connecting as she muttered, "What?"

A second later Clint also appeared. "This better be good, Tony."

Stark's eyebrows flew up as he spotted red hair in the background of Clint's video. He opened his mouth to comment and shut it again after a famous 'Romanoff Death Glare'. Bruce and Steve both joined them, groggy with sleep.

"Alright, Avengers! We have a job to do and I need you to-"

A loud thud and a curse from the stairwell interrupted him. Thor stumbled his way through the door and shouted, "I SAW YOU CALLED, TONY! I am unable to use this device still. Do you require assistance?"

Loki's head popped up from Tony's lap as he glared at the blond god. There was a gasp from the video feed, tearing Tony's attention from the half dressed god of thunder.

"What the *hell* was Loki just doing off screen there?!"

Clint was wide awake now.

"Was he just-?!"

Natasha turned around and smacked his arm. Steve turned bright red, and looked away. Bruce looked as though he had fallen back asleep.

Tony frowned at his team. "You guys look pathetic. Do as Thor did, get down here and ASSEMBLE your asses! "

Once everyone managed to arrive, Tony explained what was happening with the help of visual aids. Groaning, everyone returned to their rooms to put on fight-worthy clothing. Gathered again and slightly more awake, they started to argue. Well, he was doing most of the arguing.

"You are *not* going, Tony," threatened Bruce.

Tony growled, his anger building. "You're *not* my father, you don't get the *luxury* of ordering me around. Hell, even if you were my dad, I wouldn't listen."

"I'm not ordering you, I'm asking as a friend. Stay here where it's safe, please?"

"I'll be fine! Besides, Loki can back me up if anything seems wrong. This guy can smell that thing like a-

Loki scowled at him. "I do not *smell* him! I sense his presence, that is all." He crossed his arms and glared at the rest of the team. "I will, however, be there to help Anthony. I think he should go, before he blows up the tower out of sheer boredom."

Steve arrived late, suited up and holding his shield in one hand. He smiled apologetically and rubbed the back of his head. "Not to make matters worse, but I don't think letting you out in public would get good reception, Loki."

Loki's scowl deepened, "I can appear as someone else for the sake of the public. Now may we leave before we miss the entire battle?"

"Yes and yes," Tony said, grabbing his suit-calling bracelets. " You puny mortals take my jet; Thor can wing it as usual. Lokes with me?"

Steve pouted. "Why can't we all be teleported there?"

Loki rolled his eyes, startling everyone as a ripple of gold flew over his body, changing his appearance. His body structure remained the same but his hair became short and dirty blond. A dark full bodysuit crawled over his body from the neck down, similar to a SHIELD uniform. He smiled as red lensed goggles appeared over his green eyes. "I cannot hold on to all of you firmly enough for the journey. If one of you let go at any point you would be lost forever, or arrive in pieces."

"I'm going for the jet, thank you very much." Bruce shuddered and left the room with the rest of the queasy looking Avengers.

Thor smiled fondly at his now blond brother only to get a sneer in return. "Do not say a *word*, Thor."

Pouting, the true blond god headed off to the roof to leave. Tony eyed Loki, admiring the way the fabric clung to his body. The blond hair wasn't so bad either, though a little too much Thor. "Anthony, if you are done undressing me with your eyes, get your suit on and let's go."

Rolling his eyes, Tony summoned his suit. "Geez, someone's eager to get out of here," he said, as metal flew into the room and placed itself around his body. As soon as the suit was in place, Loki stepped forward and took his hand. Tony smiled warmly at the disguised god before slipping

closed the faceplate. "I'm looking forward to our second date."

They arrived before everyone else, appearing in the middle of a small city. Loki frowned at the sight that surrounded them.

Well isn't THIS familiar.

There was little left of the small shops that once lined the street. The city was barely lit with what was left of its street lamps. Smoke bellowed out of a movie theatre as a few people ran past, screaming. Beside them was a university campus, its lawn now littered with rubble. Loki observed the scene carefully, locating the main source of danger immediately.

He tapped Tony's metal shoulder and thought,
"Anthony, he is on top of the building across the lawn."

The Iron Man nodded and took off towards the set of buildings as Loki followed below on foot. He was soon greeted by a mass of crawling robots. He hissed in annoyance and worked his way through them, quickly discovering their weakness in the back of their necks. Peering up at the roof, he frowned at the exchange of blasts between two metal men. Tony had said he knew the man. Apparently he was a common threat.

"Who is he? Are these robots of his invention?"

Loki teleported to the roof of another campus building, squinting around carefully for targets. Crouching down, he waited for his lover's response.

Tony responded grumpily, *"This would be Dr. Doom. I've met him a few times here or there. He wasn't a bad inventor until he went bat shit insane."* There was a huff of laughter. *"He's usually a lot more boring than this. Until he brings out the magic, anyway."*

Loki frowned and drew his attention back to the robots swarming the streets below. Taking a deep breath, he raised his arms and performed a few sharp movements with his hands. Below, dozens of robots fell to the ground, lifeless.

There was a loud grating voice from behind him. *"Oooh? Another magician, hmm? I see the Avengers are stepping up their game."*

Loki tensed to turn and was caught by a blow that sent him off the edge of the roof. Tony shouted something as he fell towards the ground before Loki grunted and teleported back onto the roof.

Dr. Doom whistled. *"Nice job, young one."*

Raising an eyebrow, Loki sneered at his opponent. *"I am thousands of years older than you, boy."*

Tony landed by his side and whimpered frantically into Loki's mind.

"Lokes!?! Are you alright? That hit you square on."

Loki turned his glare to Stark. *"Silence, I am fine."*

"Thousands of years old?! How is this possible when you look younger than Stark?" asked the larger metal man.

Tony yelled, *"HEY!?! At least say 'the same age'."*

Doom growled, and shot a self contained force field that sent Tony flying off the roof. Unmoving,

Loki frowned at Doom as if bored.

"You must tell me your secret." Doom's voice held a hidden threat.

Loki snorted and crossed his arms. "I think not. Why would one so *hideous* as yourself wish to live forever in such a state?"

There was an audible snap in the air before the armor-clad man howled with rage. Loki snickered and removed himself from sight. He reappeared seconds later, bouncing and running around the roof as Doom shot blasts of energy after him.

The real Loki smirked as he landed effortlessly next to Stark on the ground below.

"That should keep him occupied until the others get here. What exactly do we do with him once he's subdued?"

Tony sighed quietly and scanned the area for more robots. "Usually SHIELD gets him. I guess we should let those bastards hold him, even if we don't work for them anymore. Let me make a call..." He paused when he noted robots heading towards the main street. "Are you too busy with your threesome game with Doom, or can you nab those robots while I call this in?"

Loki smirked at the mortal before disappearing once again from sight. He felt a small tug as Doom managed to blast the copy of himself. He sent another one in its place as he jumped on top of a car.

Odin be damned, there are still people over here.

Raising his arms yet again, he snapped the necks of all the robots he could see. Several managed to creep away under cars to start chasing people again.

Annoying.

His magic was not flowing as easily while his attention was split between the fight with Dr. Doom and here. He jumped after the robots on foot, conserving as much energy as possible. A loud scream rang out from one of the nearby alleyways and was cut off abruptly. That was never good. No one stops screaming that suddenly unless something stops it for them. Reaching the alley, he groaned at the sight in front of him. The robots were generally harmless to Stark and himself, but to regular humans, it seemed, they were quite dangerous. A tinge of regret hit him as his eyes attempt to find movement in the carnage. He had been on many battlefields, but those bodies had been grown men, not women and children. No one can remain stoic while looking into the dead eyes of a child. Loki shivered and turned his anger on the robots. Two of them explode with a flick of his wrist, the other managed to scuttle away again.

He screamed as a sudden, sharp pain stabbed through his leg. He looked down and saw that a robot had punctured his calf with a barbed spear. It went all the way through his leg. Loki immediately snapped the creature in half, groaning at the pain radiating up through his body. Kneeling down, he inspected the bleeding wound in the darkness of the ally.

Wonderful, I can feel its poison already.

The spear was firmly embedded in his flesh due to the hooks caught in his leg. One was twisted around the bone, grating against it painfully. He stood and winced, nearly losing his balance. Why of all times did he get distracted by mortal emotions?

"Uh, Lokes? Your double is gone and Doom is ready to start searching. You alright?"

Loki grumbled internally at Tony's flippant tone and responded in a weak voice ,

"Something happened and I lost my concentration. Is anyone else here yet?"

Tony's voice snapped loudly in his mind like a flash of lightning. *"What happened!? Where are you? I'll be right there."*

Although he was touched at Tony's concern, sentiment was not necessary.

Well, Maybe a little necessary.

Smiling faintly he bent down to touch the metal protruding from his leg. He had to be sure the device moved with him if he wanted to keep both of his legs. A moment later he was once again on the dully lit lawn of the college.

"I am here, Anthony."

Tony jumped at his voice and came over to him. The faceplate was flipped up, showing a pale, concerned face looking him up and down. "Oh shit, Lokes. We gotta' get that out of there. Knowing Doom, it has some sort of poison crap on it."

Before he could respond, a spiral of wind formed around them. Loki had a split second to grab Stark and teleport to one side before Thor landed, the earth cracking beneath his feet. Loki stumbled and fell on his back, his energy growing weaker by the moment. He glared up at Stark, daring him to make a comment, and shouted to his brother from the grass, "Thor, voldugu þú fávita! *Watch* where you are landing!"

There was a curse from somewhere nearby before Dr. Doom's grating voice projected across the common. "So your golden boy is here? I should be going before the rest of your ants arrive."

There was a crackle as the large metal man shot into the air, leaving the city. Loki grumbled and stood quickly, ignoring the pain.

He snapped at his older brother, "Great job, you *oaf*. A grand landing that nearly killed us, in the middle of a fight with an enemy. Good plan."

Thor bowed his head. "I apologize, this was not how I intended to arrive." His eyes fell on Loki's bleeding leg. "BROTHER, you are harmed!?"

"Don't!" Loki hissed, stepping behind Tony. "It may be poisoned, and now is not the time for this. Isn't there someone you two should be chasing?"

Tony gave his lover a pointed look and kissed his cheek before taking off. Loki smiled to himself, reminded for a moment of their recent night together. He didn't bother to reign in his wandering thoughts, as he wasn't much of use right now as it was.

Thor stood a moment longer, his head tilted with an ear to the wind. His fingers slipped into the leather loop attached to the end of his hammer. "Brother, I hear the jet arriving. Perhaps they can help you."

Loki simply nodded at Thor as the god swung the hammer into the air. Loki stood in silence, his eyes following the receding dot that was his brother. He sighed, alone in the field of rubble with the sound of a jet filling the air as it landed somewhere nearby.

Tony had no concentration for the pursuit. He had left his mind and heart back at the college, back with Loki. Why did that damn god have to be so stoic all the time? Was it so hard to at least look like it hurt?

Like I'm one to talk.
Mr. Drink-My-Problems-Away.
...Well, not anymore but -

"TONY! DO YOU SEE HIM?" Thor's shout came from a blur of a figure above him. Tony bit back a snide remark and amplified the suits volume. "HE'S UP AHEAD ABOUT A MILE!" Ignoring the little knot of jealousy at the god's speed, he flew on.

I hope he chokes on a bug.
Dammit, I just want to go back to Loki.

He frowned and sent a small thought back to Loki.
"Lokes, I'm going to be annoying now. Are you sure you're okay?"

The god's thoughts entered his mind in a sluggish manor.
"I am...decent. Do you have...him?"

Tony squinted. "Jarvis, can you see what's going on up there?"

The British voice answered, "Apparently Thor has collided with him and they are heading towards the ground, sir."

Tony rolled his eye and dove down after them, unsure of what exactly he was expected to do. Loki's voice trickled into his head quietly.
"Anthony?"

Oh shit, he forgot to reply.
"Yeah, babe, I'm here. Give me a few minutes and I'll be right back."

He landed heavily, a cloud of dust obscuring his view. Flicking his mask open, he noticed an odd clanking sound to his left. Following it, he spotted a form in the dust. There lay Dr. Doom, flailing around on his back like a turtle. Thor's hammer was smack in the middle of the man's chest. Tony let out a satisfied laugh and grinned at Thor. "Nice work, Point Break!" Chuckling he flipped his mask down once more. "I'm gonna' head back and let everyone know where you are."

Thor smiled slowly. "Check on Loki for me, please?"
Tony snorted and shook his head before taking off.

Tony landed heavily on the campus lawn and stumbled badly before catching himself on parts of a building.

Natasha was there to laugh at him.
"Beautiful landing, I give you a 5."

Loki tsked. "You are far too kind, Ms. Romanoff. He came in too fast, one foot caught behind the other, and he only *barely* managed to stay erect. I give him a 2.5, for effort."

Tony scowled as he tilted his mask up. "Nice to see you're feeling fine, if not a little *too* lively. "

Natasha nodded solemnly. "You know, Loki, you're right. He tripped over his own leg, I'm lowering my vote down to a 3."

"Is he dying? If not, can I hit him?" Tony asked, pointing at his boyfriend.

Loki's face grew sad as he looked at Stark. "She was the one who brought it up. You would hit me even though I am unwell and weak?"

Tony paused long enough to feel guilty before a Loki smirked again.

That little bastard!

"Anthony, come here for a moment. I need something from you." Loki wriggled a finger at him. Grumbling half heartedly, he made his way over to the god. Loki was sitting on a pile of what looked like pillars from one of the college buildings. His wounded leg was stretched out with the spear still in it, bleeding all over the place. As Tony neared, he noticed that Loki was shaking.

"Come on, come closer." Loki purred, reaching his hands out to him.

Tony retracted his suit into its suitcase before reaching the god and grasping his hands.

"What do you need, Lokes?"

Smiling, Loki pulled Stark's head down, his lips inches away.

"I need a little of this," he whispered before kissing Tony deeply. A shock jumped through his chest, traveling through his lips into the god in front of him. There was a loud snap before Loki broke the kiss, licking his lips with a look of satisfaction.

Tony glanced down at the god's leg and snorted in disbelief.

"Are you kidding me? You needed a kiss to heal your leg?" He laughed in amazement at the perfectly clean and healed leg before him. "Even your damn clothes are fixed."

Loki smiled and stretched out, a shimmer of gold danced over his body and his black hair re-emerged. "If SHIELD is on its way, I would rather not be here," Loki said to Natasha, before turning to direct his question to Stark. "Shall we go?" Tony glanced at Natasha and received a nod of approval.

Grinning, Tony grabbed Loki's arm. "Let's get out of here."

Loki purred, "As you wish," before they vanished.

All I See Is You

Chapter Summary

After a rough battle, there's nothing like a few pranks.
Only, Loki doesn't get to enjoy them for very long.
New discoveries are made, and everyone suffers once more due to the Darkness.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: language / lasagna

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

[Disclaimer: I do not, in anyway, own these characters. All rights belong to Marvel etc.]

The morning light crawled across his bare back, warming the skin as it traveled across the bed. Loki rolled over with the expectation of snuggling into his lover's body, only to find nothing but cold, rumpled sheets. His eyes wrenched open to stare in sleep-logged disbelief.

Something must be wrong. There was no plausible way Anthony was physically able to drag his body from bed at this hour. Sitting up, he looked around for any clues as to where his love might be. The room was eerily sparse of any evidence that Stark had been there. This was impossible, considering that the man had completely moved into his room. Tony refused subtly, at first, to sleep in his own room. Putting it off with "Maybe tomorrow," or "I want you tonight." His refusals became more pronounced until he outright said, "*No fucking way* am I ever sleeping in that bed again."

Loki untangled himself from his green sheets, once more eyeing the floor for Tony's usual mess of clothes. Nothing. The room was as bare as it was before Stark began sleeping there.

Something must be horribly wrong.

A hiccup of fear threatened to erupt before Loki managed to swallow it back down. Sensible actions first; irrational fear second. Clothes eased their way onto him in the usual glitter of gold. He wore his Asgardian leathers as his confidence in behaving 'sensible' only went so far.

Loki ran through the halls, his footsteps echoing with no answer. He quickened his pace with each step, his calm demeanor slipping.

"Anthony!?"

His heart nearly stopped when he heard Tony's voice from the living room.

"I am here, Lokes."

Slowing his pace, Loki tried to keep from showing the panic that had welled up since he awoke. He stalked into the room and forced a calm, inquisitive tone. "Where have you been? I thought you were gone."

"I never go *far*, Lokes. You needn't worry," answered Tony from where he faced the window.

"You are up sickeningly early and that is enough to worry me. It is so unlike you, I thought I was..." Loki faltered as he watched Tony's back shudder with quiet laughter. Somehow, the mortal seemed taller, unnaturally lithe.

There was a soft snicker from the unmoving form at the window. "I am *always* here, Lokes. Aren't I often in your dreams? You are so busy protecting *him*, you have not spared a moment to protect yourself."

Pure cardinal fear gripped Loki's heart with the realization of what was standing there.

Impossible.

It is utterly impossible for him to be in here!

Stepping back, he continued to stare at the back of the man as a wave of anger pushed the fear from his mind.

"Remove yourself from Tony, or I shall remove you from him *myself*."

There was another childish giggle.

"Oh, Lokes, I'm not in Tony," the figure said as he turned and green eyes met green, "I'm in you."

Pain seared across Loki's face before he screamed.

"Lokes! Lokes?! God dammit, stop it!"

Loki's eyes snapped open and tried to focus on the blurred face in front of him. Pain and fear turned once again into rage, a wild snarl escaping him as he lashed out. His fist made contact, although it was much weaker than it should have, for a god. He nearly whimpered at the weakness of his defense and rolled backwards off the bed. Toppling over immediately, Loki's legs gave out under his weight.

"Fucking hrell, Lrokiiii!" Stark grunted, clutching his bleeding nose and rolling off the other side of the bed.

Loki stared up from the floor in confusion, trying to catch his breath. His eyes settled on a pair of red and gold boxers on the floor nearby. "Oh...this is real?"

Tony grumbled and grabbed a few tissues, stuffing them up his nose. "What gave it away? Did you take the red pill from Neo?"

A faint smile formed on Loki's lips at the familiar banter as he sat up gingerly. "A small similarity.

It was your red boxers. I am sure the concept is the same."

Tony snorted, accidentally sending one of the bloody tissues flying across the room.

Loki sneered in disgust at the mess. He rose, managing to stand on his shaking legs. He limped closer to investigate the damage. "Anthony, I am *so*, truly sorry."

Loki placed his hands on either side of Tony's head, but flinched when Stark ran a thumb gently down the side of his own cheek.

Wearily, Stark took Loki's hand in his, pulling him towards the bathroom. "Worry about yourself first, dear. You clawed your face to shreds in your sleep."

Following the mortal in silence, Loki slowly starts to register the stinging pain from his cheeks and lips. Loki reaches out for his magic to heal and finds very little available. He scowled as his memories of the previous days trickle back into his mind.

They had gone home and had time to enjoy one delicious hour to themselves before the group returned. Planning pranks for everyone, they sadly only managed to set up three in time. The couple hid in one of the spare bedrooms to watch live on-screen as Steve stepped through his bedroom door, right under a falling bucket of honey. Roaring with laughter as the captain's mild curses screamed through the audio, they almost missed Clint's mishap. Loki had gotten clever with a little mass displacement inside the archer's bedroom. Not only had he moved everything around to opposite places, there was an invisible hole in his bed.

Tony commented drily, "Such a practical use for your magic, Lokes."

"I don't hear you complaining when I duplicate myself during some of our more adventurous nights."

Loki snickered.

Blushing, Tony went back to watch eagerly as Barton stripped down to his appalling purple boxers, apparently unaware of the changes to his room. Clint muttered something sleepily before diving into the bed. They could barely hear the muffled shouts above their own laughter. Unfortunately, Thor was not returning to the tower until he visited Jane. The trap would have to wait; hopefully the cream wouldn't sour too much.

The tricks had been, admittedly, childish things to do. But he was the trickster, after all, and it seemed to lift Tony's spirits. They stayed hidden in the room as the two angry, now wide awake men scoured the penthouse rooms for them. It was amusing up until the point where Loki suddenly became sick.

It started with an ache in the back of his neck that grew into a throbbing pain. Nausea suddenly gripped his insides as a pressure grew in his head. Grunting, he fell forward and pressed his forehead to the cool floor. He tried to speak but found his tongue a dead weight in his mouth. Unable to move, he groaned as his entire body started to stiffen.

"Fuck fuck *fuck*, this is the god damn poison, isn't it?!" Tony demanded as he jumped up.

"I bet you didn't check your god damn body after you healed the leg. You just ran off, even after I warned you."

Loki struggled to speak and gave up, forcing a thought through the growing pain.

"I...did...check. Nothing was there at the time..."

Tony ran both hands through his hair and closed his eyes.

"Jarvis, wake up Bruce. Let those two angry guys know what's going on, too." He sighed and squatted down next to the god, laying a hand on Loki's body gently.

"The last thing we need to deal with is sticky and pissy."

It was a long night of pins piercing his flesh, fire burning through his tense muscles, and a constant pressure in his skull. Unable to scream, he had no release for his tension. Loki had to force himself not to vomit, as it was likely that he would choke on it due to his tightly clenched jaw. At some point Dr. Banner injected him with something that finally let his rigid body relax. As soon as his jaw relaxed, Loki let out a long overdue series of screams.

Now free to speak, he began to rant, half mad with pain and beginning to hallucinate.

"I will *rip* his flesh from toe to ear. *Bleed* him until he is close to death, and start all over again. Ég ætti að hafa rífið hann í sundur!" He screamed again before falling into a fit of maniacal laughter.

"Borða augun. hlæja mæður andlit hans. Hann mun dine on his own *innards*!"

Tony swallowed the bile that rose in his throat and looked away from Loki. "Bruce, *please* tell me that you got something to knock him out?"

The doctor grimaced, his face as pale as Tony's. "I'm afraid I haven't found anything strong enough yet. He's still a god who considers "mortal" vodka to be *water*. "

Tony nodded and tried to ignore the insane raging coming from his lover as he turned to leave the tower's medical room. A soft whimper drifted through the air, causing him to glance back at the god. He found Loki's eyes focusing on him desperately.

"D-do...not l-l-leave... me..." the god begged, trying to reach out to Tony and failing.

Forcing a smile, Tony moved over to the operating table and grasped Loki's hand firmly. Bruce quickly found a stool for him and left the room to run some tests in his own lab.

"I'm right here, Lokes," Tony whispered. "I'm not leaving you."

Loki grimaced and forced his eyes to remain open, watching Tony carefully. The god muttered under his breath at something only he could see. Tony frowned as Loki glared at the empty space next to him and started to growl curses again.

Tony squeezed the god's hand, drawing his attention back. "Hey, you should focus on me, okay?" he said, holding Loki's gaze. "I don't know what or who you think you're seeing, but they can't hurt you."

Loki managed to roll his eyes even though his body was still wracked by spasms. He let out a shuddering laugh. "Anthony, I know what I am..."

With a sudden snap, his head changed direction. A snarl emitting from his cracked lips. One trembling hand rose to wave another invisible thing away.

Tony bit his lip to keep a hopeless sob from spilling out at the sight of his boyfriend. This was the most pathetic he had ever seen the god. Unable to move his body, surrounded by insane hallucinations, and all he could manage to do is swear and a desperately wave his hand.

He tried again to gain Loki's attention. "Lokes, why don't you try to sleep? Let me in and I'll fight the bad guys, okay?"

The god's neck snapped as he wrenched it back to look at Tony. His mouth opened and closed a

few times before he gargled,
"No... It's not safe... Right now."

"What do you mean?" Tony asked carefully, keeping his voice calm.

Loki gritted his teeth. "All the...traps... are open. You would not...be safe."

There was a small squeeze of his hand from the weakened god before his eyes fluttered closed. Tony continued to watch his love twitch and cry in his sleep as he bit back the screams of frustration and desperate tears that threatened to escape.

Bruce showed up a few hours later looking exhausted and a tinge green. He injected a formula into Loki's arm before muttering something about sleep and stress levels. Tony gladly let him go, patting the man on the back before sending him off to get some rest. The body on the table still twitched every so often, but whatever Bruce had drugged him with dampened the screaming and thrashing around. Standing, yet careful not to let go of Loki's hand, Tony grabbed a blanket from the shelf. He gently tucked the blanket around the god, then smiled at his action, choking on a bitter laugh.

Huh, That was strangely affectionate...for me. Loki is turning me into a big goddamned fluffy Care Bear.

Taking out his phone with his other hand, he makes a note to force Loki to watch Care Bears. A little revenge for the god's carelessness. He tried not to admit that it was just an excuse to watch the god's expressions. Loki still kept most of his emotions to himself, the usual confident expression masking his face. It was a rare pleasure to see him lose concentration and let out an honest smile, or a look of dry surprise. Tony had gotten him to cry at the movie 'Sea Biscuit' and made a special note about Loki's affection for horses.

Loki jerked again in his sleep, hissing in pain. Tony dragged himself from his thoughts and squeezed the trembling hand, trying to focus on calming thoughts to the god. He managed a smile as the god seemed to relax slowly.

Huh, so that does work.

An abrupt sharp pain in Tony's chest nearly sent him to the floor. The shock sent his heart rate skyrocketing to dangerous levels, drawing the shrapnel ever closer to puncturing the organ. He gasped for air as the pain increased. Sparks of blue light radiated from the arch reactor, spreading like veins through his arm and on into Loki's. After a final spike in energy, the light from his chest began to flicker.

Uh oh.

That's not good.

A groan from beside Tony let him know the god was awake. He felt almost relieved before his reactor gave one last feeble flicker, and died. He slid to the floor with a thud and grunted, finding it harder than usual to move. It was strange, he thought idly, usually he had enough time to at least attempt to get his back up reactor.

"Anthony..? *Anthony!*?" Loki's voice was raw from screaming. The god rolled from the table and landed wearily beside him. Cold hands turned him over as Loki's sickly gray face looked down in concern.

Tony shuddered as his body started to shut down. "Hi, Lokes. Nice...to...see you."

Loki's expression went from concern to panic the moment his eyes fell on Tony's chest and failed to see the usual blue glow.

Ripping open Tony's shirt, the god taps the reactor gently.

"It is...*empty*."

His hand sent a tingling sensation into Stark's already numbing chest. "Tony, you are quickly starting to die." Loki licked his cracked lips and looked at Tony soberly. "Tell me, what can I do?"

Tony attempted to laugh, it came out as a wheezing croak. "It's not a *huge* deal. Just run over to the lab next door and grab me my back up. It's..." he groaned, "Shit, it's probably someplace stupid."

Loki grimaced as he stood too quickly, trying hard to balance. "Wait for me, Tony. Do not die again."

Tony attempted to answer but found he was having trouble breathing. The god had already left anyway, leaving Tony to wonder what the hell just happened.

It's like something sucked out all the juice.

Loki just got better REALLY fast.

Oh. Not 'something', someone' sucked out the juice.

God dammit.

His vision had started to dim when he felt the dead reactor twisted out of his chest. Tony groaned as the god clumsily shoved the new one in, first turning it the wrong way, and then failing to do the final turn. Shuddering, he reached up and wrenched it in himself, giving it the usual smack to pop it into place.

He gasped and let out a weak laugh as the magnet began to work immediately. "Another day, another near death. I'm starting to think I'll be seeing your daughter before you do, Lokes."

Loki smiled weakly, his eyes devoid of humor. There was something in his look that worried Tony. He decided to pass it off as leftover hallucination angst when Loki remained quiet as they moved into the tower's common room.

Banner was up at six, rushing from his room to head to the lab to check up on Loki. He jumped when a muffled groan came from one of the common room couches.

Upon seeing the two of them stretched out on the couch, looking half dead, he sighed with relief.

"You guys look like shit. Actually, Tony, he looks better than you do right now. What happened?"

Before Tony could begin his explanation, Loki growled.

"You are not looking very well yourself, mortal."

Bruce rolled his eyes.

"I was up all night-"

Loki snapped, "Leave us be you groveling whelp. I doubt one who cannot even control his emotions enough to stay human can help a god. Why don't you find another hovel to hide in while you play doctor to the helpless. Quit your miserable farce; the helpless one is you."

Bruce looked at Tony and raised a finger before rushing out of the room, sporting a greenish hue.

"Okay. Loki, I know you're in a huff about having no magic right now, but don't take it out on the guy who was up most of the night trying to help you." Tony attempted to keep his anger in check.

"Don't you dare pretend to understand how I am feeling right now." Loki's voice was filled with ice. "You think a quick fling entitles you to assume you know my thoughts? You are a greater fool than I imagined."

Tony tried. He really did. He wanted to smile and snap back with one of his usual quips. Maybe call Loki one of his choice nick names and make some comment on his greasy hair. Well, he just couldn't.

Tony was heart-wrenchingly *hurt*. The god had questioned what they 'had' between them previously, even pushing him away before they really settled into something like a relationship. But to come right out and call it a 'fling' to his face, that just hurt. His face must have clearly shown his pain, because Loki's rage seem to falter with hints of doubt in his eyes.

"You know, that's a good question." Tony smiled bitterly. "But I never even considered that I would ever *really* know you. Would you look at that, you proved me *right*."

A spasm of shock flashed across the god's face before cold anger returned. "You have not even *begun* to delve into the recesses of my mind. I never intended to stay on this hopeless wreck of a planet forever, *Stark*. Just because we are soul mates, does not mean we must remain together."

Tony's expression melded into frigid contempt as he stood.

"You're right again, *Laufeyson*. After all, 'soul mates' doesn't mean a whole lot to an Atheist. You know, I'm a little sick of *dying* so often since you showed up. I think it's about time you got the *fuck* out of my tower and off my planet."

Loki's face paled in shock. They both froze for a moment, the god staring at him in horror at Tony. "You...You do not truly mean that."

Tony's anger easily slid away at the sadness in Loki's voice, leaving a dull ache in his heart. "No, I don't mean all of it. But if you keep stabbing me in the back with this bullshit, I will mean it."

Loki deflated, sinking down into the couch. He smiled ruefully as he watched Tony move closer. His voice nearly a whisper, Loki looked down at his hands. "I do not understand where this anger is coming from inside of me. I can't...I never intended any harm to you, Anthony. If I had known the creature had followed me, I would have never expressed any affection towards you."

Tony flung himself onto the couch and let out an explosive sigh. "Yeah? Well I sure as *hell* would have still shown you my affections. How well do you think you would have held out before caving?"

At this, the god jeered and leaned back into the cushions. His gaze slowly lifted from his fidgeting hands to smile weakly at Tony. "You have an awful lot of confidence that you would sway me so easily."

"For once, this isn't self confidence. I'm confident in you." Tony smiled and winked at the god. "I knew you had a soft spot for me before we ended up in that freezing-ass cave."

"A soft spot?" Loki scoffed. "Whatever makes you say that?"

Tony smiles with pride and reaches over to play with Loki's hair. He never mentioned his theory on Loki's blue eyes. Knowing him, there would be a well reasoned response on how impossible and foolish his idea was. Absolute denial.

"Your eyes turned green when we were being all flirty and clever at each other. Before, you know,

you threw me out a *window*." He grinned as if that explained everything. The gods eyes narrow at him before he leaned into Tony's hand. Waiting for him to respond, Tony continued to fidget with his hair.

Loki exhaled slowly, his brow furrowed,
"Is this true? What were we speaking of when it happened?"

Tony, leaning his head back on the couch, replied, "Something about you not having a throne here. Give it up, yadda yadda yadda."

There was a sharp movement from his side, causing him to glance over nervously.

Loki was sitting straight up, a look of smoldering disgust apparent on his features. He snarled, "It would be appropriate that I would return to my pitiful self in that moment. It seems my memory of betrayal was strong enough to fight the Tesseract's power." His expression softened slightly. "I do not think it had anything to do with you, Anthony. Although..."

Tony sulked. He arched an eyebrow to feign interest but grumbled on the inside.

*I knew he would shoot it down.
And here I thought we had a connection before all the crazy intergalactic travel shit.*

Loki continued a moment later, sounding embarrassed. "I was oddly interested in you. Even through all the persuasions of Thanos, I kept a few personal interests. One would be my fascination with you." Loki flushed slightly. "Even when I first arrived, I did the bulk of my research on Anthony Stark."

Tony grinned again, his internal funk now appeased.
"Awww! In a sort of creepy stalker way, I feel loved!" He laughed.

Loki's blush deepened as he looks down at his hands again, his fingers picking at a hem of the sleeve. Tony watched him, curious of his change in demeanor. After a moment there was a soft mumble from the god.

"Hmm? Sorry, I didn't hear that." Tony smiled and leaned closer to hear.

Loki bit his lip and glared half heartedly at Tony before glancing back down. "I said...you *are* loved."

Loki had not expected Tony's reaction at all. At worst, he knew the mortal's ego would expand considerably wider. The least he expected would be a never ceasing torrent of mockery.

But Tony had all but exploded. His face went a dark red, jaw dropping in surprise. He stood up, paced, sat back down, fidgeted. Then the largest, most genuine smile stretched across his face. Loki looked on, bemused at the race of emotions passing through the mortal's face. It looked as though there was some excitement, but Stark seemed more nervous than the god had ever seen him.

"Oh *shit*, did I really just hear that? I hope I'm not hallucinating too. If I am, I want more, please. Some nudity thrown in, maybe some lasagna." His grin never faltered as he babbled at Loki. There was a question burning in Tony's eyes.

Loki was more than glad to answer it. "I said I love you, foolish brat-."

Tony lips crashed against his own at a painful velocity, his tongue forcing its way into Loki's

mouth. He shuddered, pleasantly surprised, before slipping his fingers through Tony's hair and greedily sucking on the explorative tongue. The feverish kiss continued, their bodies pressing close in need of more contact. Loki groaned in appreciation as Stark bit his lower lip, pulling back slightly to look into the god's eyes. They both paused a moment, the nervousness returning to Tony's eyes. Frowning, Loki ran a reassuring thumb down his cheek.

The corners of Tony's lips quirked up as he leaned into Loki's touch.

"Well, I wanted to tell you first. In a lot less of a weird situation, mind you. Poison and death aren't as romantic as I would like." He babbled on nervously. "I guess that's just our daily business though. I doubt I could find the perfect situation to say this considering we were enemies not too long ago. I mean, the only thing that could make this more awkward is if I started talking about your liver and fava beans. I mean really, nothing ruins romance like a ca-"

Loki pinched his cheek. "Anthony, you are blithering."

Tony bit his lip and burst out, "I love you!" He blushed a furious red.

Loki chuckles, and caresses his lover's cheek. "I know."

Tony glared at him playfully. "Whatever, Han Solo."

The next day was relatively quiet. There were a few moments where Loki simply exploded for no reason, flying into a rage at some poor soul who was near. It became apparent that it was some after effect of the poison. Regardless, he wasn't making any friends.

"The mere fact that you *throw* a shield in battle is ridiculous. Do you not even grasp the fundamentals of battle? An Asgardian *child* could take you in a fight with ease!"

Steve looked desperately between the shouting Loki and Tony. Tony noticed the soldier's still sticky hair and grinned, giving him a thumbs up. Steve moved slightly closer to the two of them. The raging god was slightly less threatening when sitting slumped on the couch, snuggled against Tony.

Steve frowned. "Uh, Tony, why is he yelling at me as soon as I walk in the room?"

Clint came in yawning. "Oh, looks like you're alive, Trickster. Good, because I have a 'hole' lot of questions that need answering."

Both Steve and Tony made quick, furious hand gestures to stop Clint from poking the angry bear. Especially with bad puns.

"*What* did you say, you talentless sack of hestur skítur?" snarled Loki at his new target. Tony burst out laughing, startling everyone.

Clint stared at the two of them in confusion. "Okaaaay. What did he just call me, and what hell is going on? " His eyes drifted to Stark's ripped T-shirt. "And... why do you have a new reactor?"

Tony shrugged and grinned at the archer. "He called you a 'sack of horse shit'. I have a new reactor because he sucked all the power out of my old one to kick the poison out of his system." He stretched and yawned loudly. "As to what's going on, Loki's having a piss fest as a side affect from being poisoned. I *think*. That, or he's just an angry wittle Smurf."

Loki turned and glared at him, earning him a smirk from Tony. The god's expression softened before he turned his glare on the other two again.

"Since when can you understand that gibberish he speaks?" asked Clint, a bit of distaste in his voice. Tony's eyes widened slowly as the realization dawned on him that he could, indeed, understand the god's language.

"Holy shit, *what?!'*" He grabbed Loki's head and forced him to look at him. "Say something in nonsense again!"

Loki hissed between his squished cheeks, "It is not *nonsense*, is it the ancient tongue of Asgard."

"I. Do. Not. Care. Say something!" Tony demanded, refusing to let go of the god's head.

Loki attempted to kill Tony with a better 'Death Glare' than Natasha.

"það er ómögulegt fyrir þig að vita þetta tungumál," he muttered.

Tony remained frozen long after the god spoke, his head tilted slightly to one side as if still listening.

A bemused smile grew. "Oooh, Lokes, I think I *do* understand it. I can hear it all normal in my head after you speak. It has your creamy British voice and *everything*. It's like you're 'Mind Link' has upgraded with translation services now." He wiggled eagerly, nearly ending up in Loki's lap. "Do it again!"

Loki continued to playfully insult his boyfriend in an ancient tongue. After a few worried glances between one another, Rogers and Barton started making suggestions for things Loki could say. The god's mood seemed to lighten towards them as they all joined in.

Thor arrived on the roof in a pleasant mood. He and Lady Jane had spent most of the night looking at the stars and talking about their childhood. Thor did most of the talking, considering his childhood was considerably longer. Stars still reflected in his eyes, he wandered down to the common room greeted by laughter.

"þú ert hrjóta er ekki sætur," Loki was saying happily.

Tony pouted. "I'm always cute, and I don't snore."

Thor stopped in the doorway, his mind catching up with what he just heard. He stepped farther into the room, his confusion growing. The group continued on, failing to notice the blond god behind them. After another exchange between his brother and Stark, he stepped up behind Steve.

"What has transpired while I was away?" he asked, looking between his friends. Steve attempted a modest cough to cover up his manly squeak of surprise. Tony's happy expression faded as a hint of fear crept into his eyes.

"Thor," drawled Loki, "you have missed many things. Perhaps you should head to your room to relax first, before we discuss them."

A grin snuck its way back onto Tony's face.

Spotting Stark's smile, Clint suddenly grabbed Thor's arm. "Don't do it! It's a trap!"

A pillow hit the archer's head with a disappointed 'awwww' from Tony and a snicker from Loki. Thor frowned as he eyed his brother, still lounging against Tony on the couch. Loki looked paler than usual, a hint of blue in the shadows of his face. Thor noticed the trickster's body twitch a few times, a sign that not all was well. His frown deepened when he realized he could not feel his brother's usual energy in the room.

"Brother..." Thor began, before his eyes returned to Stark. The mortal clearly fared worse than Loki. His usual tanned skin was a nasty yellow, purple veins running up his neck from his new reactor. Tony's red, sleep-deprived eyes were shadowed heavily and Thor could see the hint of pain in them.

"Will someone please tell me what has happened? Everyone was well when I left last night. Why does my brother and his mate look so poorly?" Stepping closer to the couch, he crossed his arms, clearly done waiting for answers. A hand briefly squeezed his shoulder as Steve and Clint left the room, leaving the explanation to the two on the couch.

Tony shouted after them, "Thanks a lot, jerks. Make the sick guys do all the talking!"

Sighing, Tony turned to Thor while tucking his feet up into the couch.

"First, I gotta' warn you, Loki's chosen side effect of being poisoned is be an angry snow man. If he starts yelling at you, ignore it. Considering that he *usually* yells at you, I'm pretty sure you can handle it."

Thor blanched. "P-poisoned?! Why was I not called back here?"

He waited for a response while the couple glared at each other in silence. The minutes dragged on as the two had some sort of silent exchange.

Tony exploded, "I am not! Also, you can stop swearing at me in my head with your old man Asgard language, it's all English to me."

Loki turned abruptly away from Stark, crossing his arms in frustration. " You forever ruin everything, Anthony," he hissed.

After a vague and snarky explanation of the previous night's events from Loki, Thor growled, growing more frustrated. Tony offered a less snarky, but still vague version of his own.

"The reason Tony can speak our ancient tongue is due to poison?" Thor asked, his annoyance growing. He was not prepared for this after a long, sleepless night. Stark let out a bark of laughter, covering his mouth when both gods glared at him.

Loki, turning to face his brother, said with a newly amused smile, "Tony can not speak the language, and I *refuse* to allow him to try again. As for the reason he can understand it, there have been some...changes since last you were here. " A hint of pink tinged both of their cheeks as they glanced at one another.

One blond eyebrow raised in question, Thor asked, "What changes?"

Tony coughed. "Our connection...deepened. Let's just leave it at that. Oh,there was some sparkly energy transference that might have had something to do with it. Loki sucked me dry."

The dark hair god choked, pulling his knees up to shield his face from his brother's eyes. A blush blossomed across Thor's face before he muttered, "I...see. I hope you both continue to heal. I shall...leave for bed now."

The couple left soon after Thor had shuffled away, heading up to Loki's room to get some much needed rest. After collapsing into bed together, neither bothering to remove their clothing, a small roar burst through the tower.

"WHAT IS THIS DISGUSTING SUBSTANCE?!"

And as exhausted as they were, they laughed for hours before they managed to fall asleep.

The face in the mirror looked as though a wild animal had played with its food. Loki grimaced down at the chunks of his own flesh being washed from beneath his nails. Stark had already cleaned the wounds, applying a stinging liquid remedy before he left the bathroom to find gauze.

The nightmare, had it been real? Did the beast manage to break his spell somehow and enter his dreams? He was unsure of anything after the previous night of hallucinations.

"Hey, don't just zone out. Come here and let me patch you up."

Tony's voice drew Loki away from his thoughts. Grunting in response, he shuffled into the bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed. His thoughts wandered once more with Tony dancing around him, sticking gauze pads across his wounded face.

Tony babbled about hallucinations, a drug trip he had once, and how they fade after time. Loki smiled faintly at his lover's attempts to fix him, body and soul. Turning to look out the magical, tinted window, he wonders if he will get through another day.

Nick Fury Has a Bad Day

Chapter Summary

He had it coming, he had it coming
He only had himself to blame.

Chapter Notes

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

[Disclaimer: I do not, in anyway, own these characters. All rights belong to Marvel etc.]

Director Nick Fury started out his day as normal as any other. As everyone knows, that means everything is going to go to shit. He woke with a slightly stronger headache than usual. Nothing strange enough to make note of, as it faded while he drove into work. The phone rang from the dashboard of his car, causing his ever present scowl to deepen. Pressing a button on the wheel, he answered, "This better not be important. I'm not gonna get there any faster in this traffic."

"It's Doom, sir, he's escaped."

Doctor Doom sat in his white walled cell, deep inside SHEILD's helicarrier. According to the director, the world was safer if Doom was on the move constantly. The Doctor disagreed with that notion, failing to see how keeping an intelligent inventor on a giant flying machine was 'safer' for anyone. Sadly, no immediate plans of escape seemed probable. He sat on his cot, a finger picking at a small ridge of metal on the wall. They had removed his armor, exposing his burnt flesh for all to see. Although the guards remained quiet and professional, Doom knew what they thought of him. Without his shell, the doctor felt as though he was simply Victor again. Flesh and blood, weak and hideous. This whole experience was working wonders on his self esteem.

"Doctor Doom has escaped!" a voice over a loud speaker announced. Several obnoxious alarms sounded at once along with a female voice stating that a 'Number 5 Lock Down' was in progress. Victor, more confused than he ever felt in his entire life, stood and approached the clear glass front of his prison. A moment later, several guards and a female agent arrived to peer into his cage.

The doctor huffed in amusement. "Agents, as you can see, I have not escaped. Yet."
There was a long, tense moment of people peering through the glass before the woman spoke.

"I don't know how he did it, but he's down right disappeared." Turning away, she barked orders for an internal parameter check.

"Someone get me Fury on the line, now!"

Doom waited for someone to come back and tell him to relax, that it was just a joke or some sort of test. When none came, he lifted a hand and waved it in front of his face.

"I thought you were considered to be intelligent," said a familiar, drawling voice from behind him. Victor jerked in surprise and turning, found a green and black clad man standing in the small cell.

Doom stared, not bothering to mask his contempt.

"You again. I assume this is your doing? Explain what is going on, immediately!"

Loki smiled with too many teeth, baring them like an animal ready to pounce. "I fear you *are* correct on your assumptions that you are invisible. They shall neither hear you, nor feel you. You are but a ghost, haunting this ship."

Crossing his arms, the doctor sneered at the confidence of the man in front of him. "What on earth could you possibly gain from making them think I have escaped, when I have not?"

Loki stepped closer, his hands clasped behind his back in a distinct show of confidence. It spoke volumes of how vulnerable and weak he knew Doom was. Victor did not even register as a threat.

A low chuckle proceeded his next words. "What we gain is of little importance to you. Although, I might want to mention something about your little predicament."

Doom snarled quietly, glaring into the man's eyes with all the hatred he could muster. "And what would *that* be?"

Loki's smile returned, toothy and venomous. "They do not *feed* ghosts." he said, before disappearing from the cell.

Fury pulled into New York's SHEILD headquarters with a renewed migraine. Exiting his car with inhuman speed, he reached the desk before the guard had time to pull out his key card. Fury moved forward without stopping, swiping his own card as he reached the door. The director's face abruptly met with the door, which failed to open. The young guard froze, his key card slipping from his stunned fingers to the floor. If the man hadn't worked here for over a year already, he would have burst out laughing. As it was, he already felt the blame for this creeping up on him. The director calmly turned on his heel and swooped down, picking up the man's card. In one swift movement, he spun around and swiped the card past the scanner. The door opened and he stepped through without a word. Only after the door closed did Fury stop to wipe the small dribble of blood from his nose.

Someone's day was gonna' end, today.

After many stops to explain, in his best shout, why he failed to have his usual clearance pass, Fury made it to the observation room.

"Show me the footage from his cell."

"Right away, sir. You can see him here," Agent Hill pointed to the cot on screen where Doom picked at the wall, "doing absolutely nothing interesting. The next second, he's gone. No heat signature, no air disturbance; not even a puff of smoke."

Fury's teeth ground together in synch with the gears in his head. Doom was a deeply intelligent man. If Stark wasn't such a good looking quick thinker, the doctor would rule the world of technology. As far as plans go, Doom wasn't very good at thinking ahead. A month in a cell doing nothing, then suddenly—poof? Something was off about this, other than the fact that a man just disappeared off his helicarrier without a trace.

"I need to get up there, see the room myself," he said, turning to leave the room. Agent Hill stopped him. "Sir, there's something else..."

Nick froze, continuing to face the door. "Isn't there always? What is it now?"

"It's the 'Casket of Ancient Winters', sir. It's gone."

-

Loki. Mother fucking Loki Laufeyson Frost Giant Jr.
This entire thing had his greasy little fingerprints all over it.

Fuming, the director reached his office with considerably less stops this time. Stabbing a finger into the keys on his phone, he speed dialed the Avengers Tower.

An electronic, British voice answered. "Director Fury, please state the reason for your call."

"The reason for my call is to speak to a god damn human being over there. Connect me to someone." Fury jabbed the speaker phone button and slammed the phone in its cradle.

"I'm afraid the Avengers no longer follow orders from you, sir. Unless there is a valid reason for you to be calling, I'm afraid I must hang up."

Fury's patience ran thinner than usual. "Listen, you piece of scrap metal, Loki has just released a dangerous criminal into the world and he stole a weapon of mass destruction. Get me a god damn Avenger on the phone!"

There was a moment before Jarvis responded. "I'm afraid that would be impossible, sir, considering Mr. Laufeyson has been in the tower since yesterday evening."

The director froze, glaring down at the phone. He was getting the run-around from a damn machine. "What you understand about that slimy magician is *very* little compared to what I know. So before I come over there and put a bullet in your hard drive... Put. Someone. On. The goddamn. Phone!"

Jarvis' tone sounded amused. "I'm afraid I know everything that you know about Mr. Laufeyson, and more. Now if you are finished making threats against technology, I shall end this call."

Fury's jaw dropped. "Are you really a robot?"

"No less than you are, sir. Good day."

It took all of Fury's effort to not smash the phone into the wall repeatedly. Luckily, he didn't have to focus on it much longer.

Somewhere off the coast of New York city, the helicarrier made an alarming creaking sound before suddenly changing direction. Another set of alarms buzzed across the ship and back on the ground, a small light began to flash on the director's desk. He glared at it until he was positive it wasn't going to stop blinking on its own, and pulled up his computer screen. Onscreen he watched

as the carrier started to move away from New York.

Fury dialed the control room.

"You guys mind telling me why you're off course all of a sudden?"

The woman at the other end answered fearfully, "We don't know yet, sir. The entire craft is out of our control and it seems to be heading north. I think we've been hacked, sir."

Watching as the craft seemed to do a loop-de-loop on screen, Fury started to grind his teeth again. "Shut it all down and turn on the emergency landing protocols. After that, try a reboot. Call me if anything else goes wrong."

"But, sir, we have the crates of live test animals to-"

Hanging up before the woman could finish, Fury dialed Agent Hill.

"Director, the helicarrier is-"

"I know. It's flying around in circles like a teenage prick in a parking lot," Fury growled. "I need men. We're going to see some Avengers."

It took a half hour to get into the Avengers Tower. The usual ways of entering were all barred, including the usual SHEILD hack. In the end, they were forced to blow one of the doors off its hinges and march in like a police raid. Fury stepped through first, ignoring the tingle on his skin as he passed through the door. Guns ready, he and fifty of his soldiers worked their way up to the top levels. Fury frowned at the empty labs as a seed of doubt started to grow.

Where the hell was everyone?

There was a high pitched scream from down the hall. Fury drew his weapon and joined Agent Hill to investigate. The man who had screamed stumbled backwards out of the room, looking embarrassed.

"Is it Loki?" Fury asked, stepping in front of the man to view the room. He stopped, his jaw tensing at the sight that greeted him. Arranged around the room were six cardboard cut-outs of the Avengers and Loki. Each one posing as if caught innocently in the middle of doing something. The Black Widow was leaning against a wall, looking towards Clint with an amused smirk. Thor, next to his brother, looked positively pleased to be there, whereas Loki faced the door with a glare. Fury dragged his eyes around the room until he found Stark. The cardboard cut-out was in a corner and the man pictured had his pants dropped down, mooning the entire room.

Fury felt his temperature rise.

"Is this motherfucker kidding me?"

"Sir," Hill spoke up, "there are more of these around the tower."

Fury turned and stalked out of the room, ignoring the sudden wave of reports over the radio.

"Sir, I've *found* them! Oh... Never mind it's just.."

"Oh god! *Oh god*...what are they doing!? Is he doing that with...*Loki*!?"

"It's them! I found- no, I'm sorry."

"Director, you need to *see* this. There's a message for you."

Fury frowned. "Where?"

The common room was empty except for another set of cardboard Avengers. This time though, there was one of Fury himself. He was standing, arms crossed, surrounded by the others. There was something considerably threatening about the way they were posed. Each one looked deadly serious, all facing the cardboard Fury, yet their eyes were looking directly at where the real director stood.

Fury shrugged off a shiver at how carefully planned this was, for a bunch of childish shits.

"Where's the message, or is this it?"

Agent Hill cleared her throat. "You might want to step back and look down, sir."

Glaring at her for lack of a previous warning, the director stepped back to view the message, his feet now sticky with what looked an awful lot like blood.

Scrawled across the floor in front of the cardboard Fury's feet read,

"We know what you did last summer."

Tony chuckled and handed the binoculars to Bruce.

"Take a look, I'm gonna' try for a triangle now. Let's test some sharp turns in this baby!"

Bruce lifted the binoculars to peer at the large, spiraling craft. "Don't. You don't want to kill people." There was a giggle from Tony. Bruce frowned at his friend. "You *don't*, do you?"

"Hey, you had no problem with the loop-de-loop an hour ago. I doubt a triangle with cause more damage than that." Tony flashed a grin at the doctor.

Bruce smiled back at him bitterly. "They pursued me around the globe and threatened the people I *care* about. A loop-de-loop is a lot *less* damaging than what I want to do to them."

"Then let's get some geometry going, shall we?" Tony powered up the controller and let out a content sigh. "This is better than alcohol. I *never* thought I'd say that in my life."

Clint laughed from across the roof, his lawn chair placed in front of a telescope. "Don't make this your new addiction. This one might actually kill you." Steve tsked and shook his head from his perch on an air conditioner.

Bruce nodded in agreement and settled back into his own green striped lawn chair.

Tony grumbled and squinted at the ship, trying to see his execution of the triangle. "Don't worry about it guys, I've already got a new addiction."

Bruce watched through the binoculars as Tony pulled off a vertical hexagon, trying to think of what his friend meant. He fidgeted for a moment with the zoom, but gave in.

"Alright, I'll bite. What is it?"

"What is what?" Tony glanced over, distracted from another perfect spiral.

"What's your new addiction?"

Eyebrows raised, Tony hoists a thumb over his shoulder at the lounging figure of Loki.

"That pearly piece of ass right there."

Loki glanced up at this, looking at Banner, before he shrugged and went back to watching his tablet's screen. Steve groaned from his seat on the AC unit, and went back to sulking.

Bruce blinked slowly at Tony, then let out a huff of laughter. "I walked *right* into that one." Glancing back at the god, he directed his question to Loki. "How are the SHEILD agents doing? Any of them headed our way yet?"

Standing to stretch, Loki tossed the tablet onto the reclining chair. "Looks like our Director has figured it out. We should gather together now."

"Finally!" Clint yelled, jumping up. "I haven't had much to do all this time. You guys took all the fun."

Natasha rolled her eyes as she unfurled gracefully from her own chair. "What are you complaining about? You were the one who set up most of those cut-outs. You were having way too much fun. Everyone else got bored."

Steve jumped down and wandered over, grumbling quietly at no one in particular. Both Tony and Clint threw a glare at him out of habit.

Tony slapped the captain on the back. "Don't sulk, Spangle Toes. You helped too. You brought the American touch to our little revenge."

Glaring, Steve shrugged Tony's arm off. "Am I the only one who thinks we're going too far? *None* of you feel even the least bit guilty?"

The others glanced at one another before looking back at him. Natasha shrugged. "Rogers, you don't know half of what Fury has done in his long time post as director."

Steve came closer to the group, his confidence waning. "Maybe if you told me what he did, I would have less trouble with this."

"If I told you, I'd have to kill you," Natasha returned, smiling as if it was a joke. Her tone, though, was serious.

"Steve, he let us hunt Loki even though he knew my Frosty was being controlled," Tony said. "He was the one who nearly *killed* both Lokes and myself with that little test of his. He makes weapons, which isn't saying much when I say it. Oh, and he chased Bruce around with threats."

Bruce muttered, "And he does useless, scientific tests on reptiles..."

Tony continued, "He lies, he cheats, he probably has a second wife. He's wrinkly and is missing an eye. Need I say more?" Stark raised an eyebrow, not really asking for an answer.

Steve looked away apologetically, "I didn't forget what he did to you, Tony. I just don't want innocent people getting hurt."

"They always do when the big guys fight. But I'll lighten up on the joy ride, just for the sake of your morals." Tony quietly squeezed his shoulder as they lined up, facing the only door to the roof.

Landing gracefully, Thor joined them with a solemn face. "There seems to be no one coming to aid them from the skies."

The moment he reached the group, the door burst open to reveal a scary looking man with an eye patch. The group remained silent as soldiers fanned around around them, leaving a gap for Fury to approach.

"First off, I wanna' start by saying a personal 'Fuck You' to you, Stark," Fury spat, pointing at Tony

threateningly. Tony smiled slowly and said nothing.

A silent Tony Stark was director lost a little steam at the lack of response.

"*Secondly*, all of you are now responsible for harboring a dangerous criminal. Loki released Doctor Doom earlier today and while he was there, stole back the casket."

Loki snorted and leaning his head back to look down his nose in disdain.

"I assure you that I did neither of those things. In fact, you might want to be sure Doom is *actually* missing."

Fury gritted his teeth, his finger twitching on the trigger of his gun. A glance at Thor loosened his grip a little. The god could be intimidating.

"He isn't in his cell, and you were there around the same time he disappeared, stealing the casket. Doom we can handle on our own. You with a weapon of mass destruction, we can't."

Loki laughed outright and stepped forward a little from the group.

"Shall I start my list, now? Firstly, Doom is safe in his cell. As safe as he can be after such a joyful ride." Tony snickered. Loki paused for a moment, letting the tension build. "*Secondly*, you never had the casket in your possession."

"Excuse me? Are you telling me you gave us a fucking *fake*?!"

Fury exploded. This was the absolutely final motherfucking straw.

His question was greeted by Loki's cold sneer. "Director, you deserve applause for figuring it out so quickly. Did you honestly expect me to give you something so dangerous? Really. After you were given the Tesseract, what was it that you chose to do with it? Unlimited power was bumped down the list for weapons development. I may be a dangerous man, but at least I do not hide behind the false pretense of justice." Loki glanced down at his hands in distaste. "Also, as I told you before, I am the only one left who can control the casket. If your scientists were able to open it, it would have killed everyone in this pathetic realm. Even I would have been powerless to stop that."

Fury's eyes narrowed as he moved closer. "So that *was* you this morning, poking around in my goddamn head. You aren't doing a great job in convincing me that you're not a mad dog that needs to be put down." He gestured with his gun at the rest of the group. "How about you lot? You're just gonna' let this asshole run around with a deadly weapon? I might wanna' add, the shit you just pulled can land you in one of our cells."

Tony smiled, tilting his head to the side. "Funny—as far as I can tell, Loki always has a deadly weapon. I believe it's himself? Also, I'm the only one in the group who's actually done anything illegal. Not that you can prove it." He nodded to the god to his left. "Loki never stole anything or released Doom. The rest of them are guilty of nothing other than having way too much fun with my money and a print shop. Loki might have helped a little there too. Oh my god, what a villain!"

At this point, Fury was trembling with his surname. "You know, Stark, you seem to be the one dragging everyone down. Ever since you got back from your little honey moon, you've butchered the Avengers, slept with a criminal, and made an enemy of one of the most powerful organizations in the world."

A burst of laughter echoed across the roof as Tony dashed forward, to the front of the group. Bruce tensed up, his eyes flicking to Thor questioningly. Thor caught the look and nodded a little, gripping his hammer.

"Aw, shucks, Patches." Tony said, grinning amiably. "You ain't my enemy. If I considered you my enemy," he went on, his smile dropping with his tone, "there would be no SHEILD by this time tomorrow."

Fury opened his mouth to reply, only to be stopped again by Tony. "You brought us together, this little group of *rejects*. We just showed you a small glimpse of what we are capable of. Call it a playful show of our hand. So let me ask you this, do you really think you should be threatening *us*?"

There was a moment where Tony could clearly see his words sink in. Fury's one eye widened for a fraction of a second before barely controlled rage seeped back in.

He leaned forward, his gun raised to chest level now, aiming at Tony.

"You're right about one thing, Stark. We know *exactly* what you're capable of, meaning we can predict your every move."

Loki slipped in front of Tony with a slow, deliberate movement. A snarling smile played across his face. "Then, Director, I assume you know everything about me. Please, predict my next action."

Fury's gun snapped up and aimed for Loki's head. Holding perfectly still, he snarled at the god, "I predict that your motherfucking head is gonna' be blow off if you don't stand down."

The ring finger on Loki's left hand bent slightly, and the Avengers all shifted closer to him. Frowning, the director eyed them with discomfort at their lack of concern.

Loki bared his teeth in another deadly grin.

"Incorrect. My apologies Director, but you shall be the one to retreat."

"What the fuck are you-"

A wall of light immediately surrounded the Avengers. Steve tucked in closer to avoid any contact with the mass of teal colored magic. A moment later it was over, leaving the group standing alone on the roof.

"Well, that worked amazingly well." Tony said, looking around at the rooftop, satisfied.

"Where did you send them all?" Steve asked, with a hint of concern.

Loki turned and pointed out to sea at the helicarrier before smiling.

"Oh, you *are* the best boyfriend in the world!" Tony ran to scoop up his remote control unit, and then threw himself back into the lawn chair. "I'm taking votes on where to send them. Step right up and voice your choice now, folks."

Steve spoke in warning, "No more acrobatics, Stark."

"Of course not. But I'm thinking 'Australia'."

Deep in vast silence of the Outback, a flock of birds startled and suddenly changed direction. Gunshots rang out 20,000 feet over Uluru, where, in a hall littered with broken glass and the remains of lab animal packing crates, Fury shouted into an earpiece, "Will somebody tell me why we got motherfucking *snakes* on this motherfucking *helicarrier*!"

It's All Fun and Games

Chapter Summary

Odin has called Loki home. Not as a son, but to be tried as a criminal.
There's no way Tony is going to let him go alone.
Road Trip!

Chapter Notes

WARNING: HEAVY SMUT.

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

[Disclaimer: I do not, in anyway, own these characters. All rights belong to Marvel etc.]

For several weeks after Fury's visit, Loki would send one of the Avenger cardboard cut-outs in to the SHIELD base. Tony gladly volunteered his favorite mooning one for Fury's office. Clint had saved a pile of cardboard figures and had them on rotation throughout different rooms. The one featuring Thor and his mighty glare remained in the kitchen after someone attached a tray to it and filled the thing with Pop Tarts. This pleased the god so much, they left it there and continued to refill the tray when it became empty. The tower grew calm again. As calm as a building full of crime fighting super heroes can get.

"Anthony, you can aim better than that," Loki said with a playful smirk. "Or can you only aim when your suit finds the target for you?"

Tony grumbled at the god and gathered his darts from the torso of Fury. Steve had called them immature for using the cardboard director as a dart board, but Tony saw the soldier try a shot when he thought no one was around.

Aiming again at Fury's face, Tony asked, "Are you still pissy about before?"

Loki executed his typical eye-roll and rested his weight against the arm of the couch. "I am not *pissy* about it, I am acceptably *angry* about it."

Tony's dart hit the director's eyepatch perfectly. "Boo-ya!" he cheered, turning around to look at Loki. He danced a goofy jig. "Look, how was I to know you didn't like to be watched? They're just cardboard anyway."

Loki crossed his arms and glared. "One of them was of my brother, and it was creepy. Albeit, not

as creepy as the ones the archer set up in the lavatories. I simply can *not* fathom his obsession with the things."

Tony laughed loudly and nodded. "He does have a problem. Maybe we should stage an intervention? You know, me the ex-alcoholic, telling him he has an unhealthy addiction." He turned to throw another dart. "I'm sure that will go over well. I still have two eyes that he could hit from several buildings away."

With a soft pop of displaced air, Loki appeared sudden next to Tony, darts in hand. He moved in a single fluid motion as he threw five darts in quick secession at Fury's face. All five hit around the cardboard face in a perfect 'u' shape.

"Show off," Stark muttered before sulkily collecting the darts. Loki's broad grin fell as his brother entered the room and came towards them.

"Brother, I must leave soon," Thor said as he reached them.

Loki carefully set his expression to stony, his voice slipping back into his old frigid tone. "I fail to see why that should be of any interest to *me*?"

Frowning, the blond god looked at Tony for assistance. Tony simply arched his eyebrows and shrugged. Returning his gaze to Loki, Thor spoke cautiously, "I would ask you to return with me to Asgard. Father will surely forgive any actions you committed beforehand, seeing how much has changed these past years. I would like him to know that your recent actions were not of your own volition."

Loki's scoff turned into squeak when Tony jabbed him in the ribs. Tony whispered, "Don't be a needless prick. At least *try* talk to him like you don't hate him."

Loki cast his usual glare at the mortal. "Ég vona rass þinn deflates."

"I hope your typpið deflates," Tony said, placing a hand on his chest in fake panic. "Wait! That's the opposite of what I want!"

Thor stood, blinking in mild confusion at the two. "I thought... You said Tony could not speak the ancient tongue?"

Loki said nothing, leaving Tony to respond with a grin. "I've had the ancient tongue down my throat enough to be fluent by now." He flinched as Loki delivered the much scarier 'promised death' glare. "That, uh, one word in particular I learned it from hearing Loki say it... a lot," he hastily amended.

Loki smacked his arm, hissing quietly, "Don't tell him!" Leaning closer, he muttered, "I thought you were *good* at lies."

"Well, Mr. God Of Lies, why didn't you step up?"

Loki continued to glower before turning away from both Tony and his brother. Thor stepped forward and abruptly turned his younger brother to face him. His face had reverted to grim determination.

"Brother, be serious. You may have less of a chance alone, but I would be there for you."

Loki eyed his brother's face in disgust. "You have proven how foolish you are with your trust many times before. There were many times you should *not* have trusted me; you should have seen through the lies and come to your own conclusion. I doubt the Allfather will find any comfort in the honor you believe I have. You held on to your blind devotion through the horrendous things I

did here, without ever once asking yourself if perhaps it wasn't your *brother*." Loki gestured out the window, a hint of bitterness in his voice. "Why would your word be worthy as proof of my so called 'morality'?"

Thor's face fell as he looked out at the scarred city. He stood a while, his hands still on Loki's shoulders, lost in thought. Eventually, a small smile formed. "BROTHER! Tony or one of the others would gladly come your aid and defend you! Not long ago you were fighting as enemies. To have one of them speak of your change would be our best chance."

Loki's eyebrows shot up as he cast a glance at his shocked boyfriend. He thought for a moment.

Have Tony speak for him in Asgard? The world's self-proclaimed 'Mightiest Hero' as his defendant.

Anthony in Asgard

with me.

A small seed of hope started to form in him. Turning back to his brother, Loki chose his words carefully. "I do not think they will accept his testimony. Odin still considers humans to be weak, hairless apes. I doubt he will take the mortal seriously."

Tony let out a sound of disbelief, drawing the attention of both of the gods to him. "Lokes, you consider humans to be weak, hairless apes too."

Shocked, Loki tore himself from his brother's strong arms that still rested on his shoulders. His attempts at keeping a calm face were ruined, yet again, by a mortal. Tony had a way of breaking his mask and wheedling out emotions from him. Loki turned away from them both and clenched his fists.

His eyes on the floor, he mumbled, "Not anymore."

Wholly missing the complexity of the situation, Thor slapped his brother's shoulders jovially. "It is settled then! We shall leave in an hour's time!"

Tony glared daggers at the back of the blond god bounding out of the room like a puppy.

Way to read the situation, Barbie.

Turning to face the back of his emotionally unstable boyfriend, Tony sighed. "I'm sorry for saying that. I should know better by now. It's just my mouth, it moves on its own."

"Do you truly think I still feel that way about mortals? About you?" Loki asked, his voice heavy.

Damn Anthony for doing this to him. He always makes me talk.

Warm, callused hands slipped around his waist as Tony pressed his face into the god's back.

"Lokes, I *know* you don't. Like I said, shit just pours out of my mouth. I know you don't think that I'm a weak ape." There was a chuckle that tickled Loki's back. "At least I hope I *proved* to you that I'm not."

Loki felt his spirits lift as he looked down at the arms wrapped around him. His fingers traced a small scar on the back of Tony's hand before turning them over and continuing to follow the lines on his palm. There was a small gasp from behind him. A smile grew as he pulled one hand up to

kiss each finger delicately.

"Anthony," he started, kissing a ring finger, "Will you really," a pinky, "do this for me?"

Tony was quiet as the god kissed every inch of his hands. He wiggled his fingers at his lover's lips before finally responding. "This is going to be the farthest I've ever gone for someone before. Literally. I would probably do it for you even if we *weren't* chicken-soup-for-the-soul mates. No one deserves to be shit on forever for stuff from the past. Trust me, I know. Besides, if you've changed, or whatever, they can't keep trying to punish you like a kid."

Loki snickered and hugged Tony's arms to him, feeling a return of the warmth and cheer that was lost from his brother's visit. "Yes, I would not say I've change so much as...*calmed*."

Tony nuzzled his face into his lover's back before remembering something. "You told me back in the cave that Thor was the one being punished. What is daddy-poo so upset about from before? Was it the giant metal thing you let out for a walk somewhere down south?"

Loki looked down at their hands and slid his fingers between Stark's. The man knew how to ask the right questions, in such strange ways. He frowned as memories bubbled to the surface of his mind, his gaze remaining on the tanned hands in front of him.

"I *cried*, for the first time in decades, when I begged the truth from Odin."

Loki's breath caught as Tony tightened his arms around him as if to squeeze the bad memories out of him. Loki was glad to not be facing the mortal with his emotions running amuck on his face.

"I felt this weight pressed down upon me when I touched the casket for the first time," he continued. "As though proving my doubts worsened my burden. I confronted Odin immediately, only to hear half spoken truths before he fell into his Odin's sleep. I was left, utterly alone, with no answers and a sudden throne to occupy."

His voice grew bitter. "I already spoke of the emotions I felt. To answer your question, Odin wishes to punish me for, as you would call it, 'a pissy fit'. I lost my mind from grief and betrayal and I get *punished*. What started as one simple test for my brother became a crippling price for everyone. Thor became more worthy for his throne due to my actions. Mortals were harmed, and even though the end result was what everyone desired, my actions were not well received. The destruction of Jötunheim was not something I had originally planned, it was simply a final desperate attempt at securing a place for myself in the nine realms. As though by destroying my place of origin, I could complete the lie that I knew for all these years. I could become one of the Aser. I would be accepted, not only as an equal, but seen as a great man."

Loki dropped his hands from the ones wrapped around him and turned to face Tony. He watched his lover's brown eyes filled with sadness as they met his own. "If it were anyone else," Loki went on, "They would have been seen as a mighty warrior. If Thor had done the deed, returning home with Laufeyson's head, he would be the *hero*. But I—I am *wrong*. The weak 'snake' of a brother to Thor. The trickster with no talent for battle. I was never able to prove myself, even when I destroyed the entire world of an enemy that *Odin*himself could not defeat."

Tony tried and failed at one of the things he did best. He could not think of a single thing to say. Anything now might come out sounding corny, or just rude.

If I say it wrong, it's only going to hurt him more. If I say something cheesy, it's going to be meaningless.

Since when do I care?

Just wing it.

"That sucks," Tony said.

The god let out a bemused laugh. "You impress me, as always. You summed up my miserable life in two words."

"I try."

Loki continued to chuckle as his lips brushed Tony's gently. Somewhere behind them a throat was cleared. Loki decided to ignore it and continued press gentle kisses on his love.

Thor spoke up, obvious embarrassment in his voice. "I... brother, we should go now."

"Should I bring anything, like my suit?" Tony asked, his voice muffled by the god's persistent kisses.

"No," exclaimed Loki and Thor at the same time.

The usual duel of glare versus pout between the gods proceeded as they climbed to the roof. Once there, Loki magicked away the remaining lawn chairs and hooked an arm through Tony's. Tony glanced up at the god and thought,

"Uh, Lokes? Isn't traveling going draw someone's attention to us?"

Loki smiled reassuringly.

"Do not worry, traveling with the Biofrost is different than with my magic. He should not be able to follow us."

Thor interrupted their thoughts by grabbing onto both of them. Loki snarled in surprise.

"Why must you latch onto me? I am perfectly capable of traveling on my own."

"This pathway is only tuned to me, currently." Thor smiled apologetically. "I am sorry, brother."

"Whatever."

Tony laughed. "Did you just say 'whatever'? Who'd you learn that from?"

Loki began, "Natasha was telling me..."

His words were lost in the roar of the pathway forming around them. The magic ripped them from earth and shot them quickly through a rainbow colored channel.

Tony fell on his ass the second Loki let go of him after landing. He tried to stand up twice before giving up and flopping on his back.

"I would rather watch Space Odyssey on acid a *hundred* times before doing that again," he said weakly.

Thor hovered over him in concern while Loki stood, looking down the long stretch of rebuilt Biofrost to the city. Tony managed at last to sit up again, frowning at the raven-haired god. "Good man, Lokes. Thanks for offering to help your boyfriend up."

Loki turned and said nothing as he offered a hand to assist him in standing. Tony noticed the god's hand shook as he pulled him up and dusted Tony off absentmindedly. Eyeing his lover, Tony started to see just how nervous Loki really was. His hands were balled into fists, stiff and threatening at his side. Loki's eyes were the brightest green Tony had seen so far, sparkling with

magic.

So that's what he looks like when he's really upset and not being BrokeBack Mountained by the Tessract, thought Tony.

He stepped closer and snuck one of his fingers into one of Loki's quaking fists. Tony managed to pry it open and intertwine his fingers with the god's. Loki visibly relaxed at the gesture, finally turning his attention back to Tony. "I apologize," he said. "I am more upset at returning here than I thought I would be."

Tony squeezed the thin pale hand. "Don't worry about it too much. We aren't staying, right?"

Loki returned the squeeze and glanced at his brother who started to walk ahead of them. "No, I do not wish to remain here. No matter what *they* decide on."

Tony didn't know how to respond to that so he started chattering in his mind to Loki about the approaching city. He said that he was impressed by the design work for the towers, but had a few designs of his own he would rather see. He made a fuss when he saw his first fur, pausing in their journey to take a picture of himself next to it with his phone. Tony returned to the mental commentary until they reached the steps of the great hall.

As they approached the large doors of the main hall, Tony felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. A split second later, a figure blurred across the steps towards them. Thor was too far ahead to do anything in knew that if Loki fought his attacker, the trickster would more than likely take the blame for it. He stepped directly in front of Loki, seconds before the blade reached the god's neck. The metal made a soft ringing sound as it halted, centimeters away from Tony's face.

Loki's hand had clenched his arm firmly, ready to move him out of the way. A tall, dark haired woman stood without removing her sword from Tony's face. She was panting with rage, eyes flicking between Tony's face and the god's behind him.

When the woman refused to remove the blade, Tony decided to talk. "Hello there, angry lady. Let me begin with telling you that your stupid little *trick* won't work."

The woman's mouth dropped open in surprise. She pulled her blade back as if she had been attacked and stepped away from them.

Thor strode forward, his voice heated with anger. "Sif! Why do you do this? I thought better of you."

Sif's eyes filled with guilt and fear. "T-Thor... I..." she started.

Tony laughed nastily, crossing his arms as he looked at the taller woman. "Isn't it *obvious*? She wanted to force Loki into attacking her so he would get thrown in a cell or burnt at the stake. Whatever it is you 'gods' do to your criminals. " His fake smile filled with venom. "Sorry hon, back where I'm from, it's called self-defense."

Sif scowled down at the mortal before sheathing her sword. Addressing the god behind him, she said, "Loki, I see you have somehow enthralled a dwarf to defend you."

Tony responded in Loki's place. "Just because I'm short doesn't mean I can't defend my princess here."

Sif glanced at Loki, a look of amazement forming at the lack of anger on the god's face. Her eyes returned to the shorter man, an apparent distaste starting to grow. "I could have easily killed you. I fail to see how you defended him."

"Try me."

"Are you asking for death?" Sif asked, her sword returning to her hand.

Tony smirked and tilted his head to the side. "Lady, the second you harm a hair on my head, you die. Same goes for Loki."

Both Thor and Sif looked confused at his words. Loki's long thin arms slid over Tony's shoulders and down his chest in a protective manner as he joined the conversation at last, no longer able to hold back his laughter. "My *dear* Sif. The moment you harm my brave little prince, I will *kill* you. I assume he means to do the same if I were harmed." Loki grinned, baring his teeth in a threatening manner. "I assure you, he is *more* than capable."

With this, Loki turned Stark around with him and proceeded to march him through the doors. Behind them, Sif turned to Thor and asked, "Why does he think I would harm his hair?"

Once inside the doors, Tony detached himself from Loki to look at him. His face was dark with concern and anger. "Lokes, you're still considered a prince here, right?"

Loki simply shrugged and nodded in response.

Tony's voice grew colder. "Then what the *fuck* was that shit? "

The god raised an eyebrow. "Did I not tell you of their abundant distaste for me?"

"You did..." Stark paused to look out the open doors at where Sif and Thor remained to talk. " I just didn't expect it to be so... *petty*."

Loki let out a loud laugh, and the hall echoed with it. The two outside looked up in confusion at the sound. Loki smiled an honest smile for the first time since they arrived. "I knew I loved you for a reason," he said.

"Yeah, speaking of *petty*," Tony joked, dancing away from the green sparks Loki sent his way.

"BROTHER! Be careful who sees you do that!" Thor yelled as he approached.

Casting his eyes skyward, Loki shot a few sparks at Thor as he came close. "Speak for yourself. I'm sure your yelling about it didn't capture *anyone's* attention."

Tony managed to send a small spark of blue at Loki's butt, causing him to yelp in surprise. The dark-haired god turned to say something but was interrupted by Sif.

"Mortal, you know magic? I thought humans were incapable of doing such things."

Tony flashed a grin. "I'm not your average 'mortal'." He turned to continue walking with Loki before another voice rang out through the hall.

"Sif, I see you found them before we did!"

Thor beamed as his companions arrived, and gave bone-crushing hugs all around. "Fandral, Hogun, Volstagg! I have missed you greatly!"

Fandral turned after greeting Thor to take a look at Loki and the mortal guest. He eyed Tony with amusement. "I wonder" he said, "Are all mortals this small?"

Tony flashed his usual fake grin. "Not at all, they are usually shorter. I am the tallest of my kind."

Loki snickered, gaining an appreciative glance from his lover.

Fandral was not as amused. "Be *silent*, Loki. You should consider yourself lucky you were even *allowed* to return." He turned to address Thor. "Why have you brought him and this weakling to Asgard?"

"Fandral, you-"

Tony interrupted in a sweet voice, "Why, Fandreal, do you feel threatened?"

The bearded blond wrinkled his nose at the thought. "Threatened? By whom, you?"

"It's okay if you are. I understand that you cultivated that beard *decades* before I did, but it's obvious who wears it better. Still, you pull off that hipster douchbag look. It's a win-win."

Fandral did not fail to pick up the insult in Tony's comments. He jumped forward to pull Stark up by his shirt, only to find his hands gripping air.

"And *that's* why you date wizards."

"Stark, you are not making many friends here," warned Loki. They had appeared in another room just moments before. Tony ignored his words to enjoy eyeing the god in his new outfit. Somewhere in the transition from room to room, Loki changed from his usual green long sleeve shirt and dark jeans into something more fancy. A sleeveless dark leather jacket covered a loose green tunic that fell to the god's knees. He noted the belt with its gold buckle. The design looked similar to Loki's helmet.

Tony sighed with appreciation. "My Reindeer has returned to me."

"Please do not start that again." Loki turned, his expression sour. "And don't think I will let the 'Princess' comment slide."

"Hey, you got your revenge already. If I recall correctly, I'm your 'Brave *Little* Prince'?"

"Oh yes," Loki smirked, "I meant to say 'Moronic *Little* Prince'."

Tony made a face and started to explore the room, giving the god a wide berth in case sparks flew. Even though they were harmless to him physically, they could still burn his clothes. He liked his clothes.

Tony's eyes traveled over the green curtains, gold hooks and clasps before realizing where they were.

"Oh! This is *your* room!" he exclaimed happily.

Loki's smile warmed as he watched Tony start to poke around the room with more vigor. The mortal found his way to a table covered with papers. He watched his lover's eyes go wide at the hundreds of drawings the covered each page.

He turned to face the god, his hands filled with scraps of paper. "Loki... these are yours?"

"Of course. Why would my room be filled with someone else's sketches?"

"Lokes, oh Lokes. We should draw together! I can't," he paused and looked down, eyes sparkling with awe, "I can't draw like this, but I can do designs. I'm more of an object guy. You clearly are the go-to guy for animals... and people... and foliage... and *everything*."

Loki moved closer to look at what Stark was admiring. He felt a flutter of joy at the mortal's response to his work. "You... do you really like them?"

"*Idiot*, they're brilliant. I want all of them. I want them everywhere in my tower. I want to be in them." Tony paused. "Okay that last one sounded better in my head."

Loki laughed and started to explain what some of the creatures were. Tony quickly became distracted by the way the god's eyes crinkled up with his smile.

*Oh my, for the lack of a better word, god.
Stop it. Stop being so cute.*

When Loki started to mime the movements of a squirrel like creature, Tony just lost it.

Tony grabbed Loki's head and kissed him roughly as he pushed the god backwards towards the bed. They stumbled into it, the kiss deepening with a soft groan from the god below him. There was an immediate reaction in Tony's lower regions at the sound, causing him to break the kiss.

His eyes traveled down the god's body as he asked, "We're not gonna' be interrupted by a gang of fur-wearers are we? The great godly one isn't expecting me right away, right?"

"No, and *no*. Do continue what you were doing."

With a smile, Tony nuzzled his face into Loki's neck. His hands sliding up into the green tunic, tracing the taut muscles appreciatively. "You're so bossy. Try ' Please, put your hands on me, Tony."

Loki pressed his lips close to Stark's ear and whispered breathily, "*Please*, shut up and *fuck* me, Tony."

Shuddering at the breath against his neck, Tony paused to mumble. " You little *shit*."

He growled and dragged his teeth along the god's collar bone before biting down gently in the dip of Loki's neck. He was rewarded with a shuddering gasp and as a small spasm rocked through the god's body.

Let's try that again.

This time, Tony began to slowly suck and kiss the skin, leaving small love bites across Loki's neck and shoulders. With each one, he moved his hands further up the tunic until he found the god's nipples. Leaning up to watch Loki's reaction, he pinched one gently between his two fingers. Loki whined with pleasure, his head tilting back to expose more of the pale neck. Tony took it as an invitation to begin his taste testing again.

With Stark's fingers kneading his nipples slowly underneath his shirt, Loki's mind started to scream for more skin contact. With every twist and pinch the mortal gave him, his heart began to race. There was no reason this small human being should be able to drive him to such lengths. His thoughts halted at the sight of Stark's face above him. The mortal's cheeks were flushed slightly, his eyes half lidded.

Those amber brown orbs that looked down at him so lovingly, so full of desire for *him*.

Anthony's eyes.

I remember why he drives me insane, He thought.

He reached up and caressed Tony's chest slowly, a finger tracing around the reactor under his shirt.

"Our clothes, Shall I remove them this time?"

Tony let out a soft groan into his ear before sitting up and straddling the god's hips.

"Do it, *now*."

A second later, both men were naked, their flesh warming where their bodies touched. Tony chuckled at his lover's unusual eagerness. Loki was the one who typically insisted they remove each other's clothes by hand. Sometimes with their teeth. He licked his lips and tightened his legs around the god's waist, pressing his already throbbing cock closer to Loki's. The heat radiating from Loki's member was inviting. A thought came to him. "Lokes... I don't want you to hate me but I want to ask you to do something for me."

The god raised an eyebrow, his body wriggling in impatience. Tony shivered and leaned down close enough for the tip of his cock to touch Loki's.

Loki twitched. "Anthony, ask me whatever you wish, but get on with it. Before I take over."

Tony took a breath and looked his lover in the eye. "Your Jotun form. I want the *real* you inside me."

There was a tense moment where he thought Loki would either burst out crying or kill him on the spot. Instead, the god responded wearily. "This is my real form. This is how I have lived most of my life. You never seemed to have a problem with it beforehand."

Tony frowned and leaned back up, ignoring Loki's soft moan at the removal of his cock against his. He continued to look into the green eyes below him. "Loki, think about this. When we first met, I mean *really* met, you were blue as the sky. I was already falling for you even then. I mean, I thought you looked *sexy* in blue." Tony chuckled to himself before continuing more seriously. "I feel like I'm not really with you, if it's not really *you*. You get all of me, all my baggage, all my scars, all my *shrapnel*."

He paused, speaking more quietly. "Lokes, there's nothing to be afraid of. You mean more to me than a flesh colored body."

Tony paused, waiting for any sort of response from the god beneath him. A moment later he got his answer.

Loki's body shuddered as icy blue tendrils crawled up the him. A chill filled the air around them as the green eyes melted into vivid red. Tony's body shivered from both cold and excitement.

He leaned down once more, his lips greedily capturing Loki's blue ones.

"*Yeesss...*"

Tony slide his tongue along the god's icy lips, enjoying the tingling sensation that crawled across his body. Loki's body was cold, but not unbearably so. There was still a small amount of warmth radiating from the god's lower regions. Smirking, he kissed his way down Loki's chest, following

the small raised lines downwards. His tongue found a nipple and began to play with it, while his hands continued to trace the lines around Loki's body.

"A-ah...Tony, it burns."

Flicking his tongue over the nipple once more, Tony paused to look up at the god. Loki's face was tinted a darker blue while his eyes glowed vividly.

Smiling, he shifted back to up to rub his nose affectionately against Loki's. "You are so god damn beautiful...I want you more and more. I –whoa!" He jumped as a cold finger teased his entrance. "Holy shit, that feels weird."

Loki snickered and pressed the finger inside slowly. "This is what you *wanted*."

Tony groaned as he felt the cold finger begun to wiggle and stretch his entrance out. His hand snuck down and began to tease the tip of Loki's member. Running one of his calloused finger down the underside of the shaft, he savored the panting moans from Loki. Tony let out a whimper as another finger was inserted into his entrance, the god stretching them out in a scissoring motion.

"Oh *fuck*, no more. I need you... all of you." Tony begged, his breath beginning to catch in his throat. With a purr, Loki lifted Tony's hips carefully and pressed the tip of his already moist cock against the entrance. The god ground his cock upwards teasingly before slipping in the head.

Tony mewled above him as Loki felt the intense warmth wrap around his member. His body stiffened, eager to be further inside of his lover. With a grunt, he pressed deeper inside feeling the skin of his cock burn from the heat.

"Nggh... *Tony*..."

Stark threw his head back and screamed. For a panicked moment, Loki thought he had hurt him. He nearly pulled out before he realized that Tony's hips were already beginning to move over him. With a shuddering groan, he started to buck up into Tony, matching his lovers pace. To say it felt amazing, would simply not do it justice. Tony was tight and hot around him, with every thrust he ground down against Loki's hips. Loki relished the expression of ecstasy on Stark's face as he rode him. The heat was driving him mad, his excitement was already too much. Looking down at Tony's neglected member, he reached down and began to pump his hand over it in quick, desperate jerks.

"Oh fuck, *Lokes!*" Tony shouted, his back arching. Loki felt the tension build before he was lost in the waves of euphoria, his eyes seeing stars. He was vaguely aware of Tony's name on his lips, his ears picking up his own name as Stark screamed and came into Loki's hand. For a moment there was nothing but their panting, Loki's eyes fixated on the beautiful image above him. Tony's body glistened with sweat, his eyes were shut as his head lolled back on his shoulders. The mortal gave a content grunt before he sagged against Loki's chest and proceeded to nuzzle into him slowly. Loki shuddered as he removed himself from inside Tony, his body started to cool once more.

From somewhere near his chest, Tony mumbled, " Tonight is officially a two-dog night."

"I have no idea what that means, Anthony."

Tony giggled sleepily as he started to doze off. "Call me Tony. At least until tomorrow."

Loki smiled and wrapped his arms around his lover. "Now who is bossy?"

Tony was already asleep, his face pressed against Loki's blue chest. The god watched him for a while before leaning down gently and kissing his forehead.

"Goodnight, Tony."

Fools of Fortune

Chapter Summary

In which Tony makes only one new friend.

Chapter Notes

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

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Mrs. Pepper Smith switched a pile of paperwork to her other arm as she entered the lobby of the Avengers' tower. Humming tunelessly, she pushed the elevator button for the penthouse floor. It had been a few days since she had received the daily 'Loki sleeping' photo from Tony. The last one had included a small collection of pens sticking out of the god's ears and nose while he slept. Why Tony persisted in sending them when he knew the god would punish him later was beyond her. Pepper, herself, had had an interesting night when her husband happened to catch sight of one of the photos. There was a tense conversation in which she explained that, no, her ex was not sending her dirty pictures. Loki was not some creepy guy who was stalking her. No, she didn't think Tony had a kink for garden gnomes; he's just weird. She gave up at some point and handed over her phone to Jonas so he could look at the rest of the ridiculous photos. After several minutes of cautious scrolling he burst out laughing. She knew she had fallen in love with the man for a reason.

The elevator doors slid open with a ding and she walked out into the living room of the penthouse. It was oddly empty.

"Guys, it's two in the afternoon," she called out, glancing into the kitchen area. "There are no excuses for sleeping this late."

When she received no response she moved down the hall towards the bedroom. Stopping a few doors away, she nervously called out again, "Hello?"

Pepper was honest with herself. Loki scared her. She was certainly happy for Tony, and she knew the god was labeled 'good'. But things are never that simple. Pepper had long since known there weren't just 'naughty' and 'nice' lists. As Clint put it, 'If Loki hasn't killed Stark yet, it's only by a miracle.'

"Are you two even in there?" she asked halfheartedly. The last thing Pepper wanted to do was be on the god's bad side. Waking him up, no matter how late in the day, was probably something to avoid. After a few minutes she felt it was safe to say they weren't in the room. She returned to the elevator with her paper work to go down to the labs.

The doors opened earlier than she expected, making her jump. "*Oh!* Bruce. How are you?"

"Hello Mrs. Smith; and I could be better," he said, looking worried. She noted his partially dressed figure and unruly hair.

"Bruce, what is going on?" she asked carefully.

"Uh, well," he started, frowning when Clint shouted from the larger kitchen, "BRUCE did you turn on your damn magic tracker yet?! We need to find them."

Pepper felt her body go stiff.

This better not be about who I think it's about, she thought.

"Find *whom*?"

Bruce ran a hand through his hair and smiled weakly. "The two gods and, uh, Tony seem to be missing."

Several minutes later everyone everyone managed to gather in the common room. Pepper was still trying to keep herself from shrieking. "*Missing!?*" she managed, not quite screaming.

"As far as we know it, they've been gone for a few days," Natasha said, crossing her arms. "There's dust on their toothbrushes already."

Pepper ran her hands over her face and started to pace.

"Wait, okay, yes. So *no one* noticed they were gone?" she asked, turning to look at the group. Everyone shook their heads in response.

"The two little shits tend to go off for a few days *all* the time. What got us worried this time was that Thor is missing too," Clint said, leaning away from Pepper as though she might hurt him.

Steve leaned forward on the couch, pinching the bridge of his nose. "We called Jane, we called Fury--"

"Which, by the way, was the *worst* thing I've ever had to do in my life," Clint interrupted, looking slightly sick at the thought. "Coming from me, that's saying something."

Pepper gave him an unamused look. "Has anyone viewed the footage from Jarvis yet?"

"Ma'am, I thought no one would ever ask me." Jarvis said, sounding strangely smug.

"What do you mean?" Pepper began, glancing at the ceiling and then back at the Avengers. "Are you telling me none of you thought to ASK JARVIS!?"

Bruce flinched and pretended to be very interested in the leather of the couch. Clint made a face like he just had a brilliant idea while Steve looked downright ashamed.

"We forget he's not just another one of us humans," Natasha said, clearly unfazed by a now shrieking Pepper. "One tends to forget that he's an all-seeing AI and not some overly polite British guy living here."

Sighing, Pepper addressed the ceiling, "Jarvis, where are Tony and the two brothers?"

Jarvis sounded pleased. "I believe they have traveled to Asgard, ma'am."

There was a rush of exclamations from everyone.

"Why are they --"

"Why didn't you just tell us, you hunk of--"

"Seriously?"

Natasha looked like she stopped caring, "Well, that explains nothing."

"Can we assume that Thor is with the other two?" Pepper asked, running her hands over her face again. It was a bad habit she picked up from years of working with Tony. At least she didn't wear makeup that could smudge. "Why would they bring Tony to Asgard?"

"According to my recordings, Tony will be acting as a defendant for Mr. Odinson," responded the AI.

"For Thor? Why would he need a defendant?"

Jarvis sounded apologetic. "I meant Loki, ma'am. Thor expressed a desire for me to refer to Loki as an Odinson, instead of Laufeyson. I thought it best not to argue with one who can shoot electricity from his body. "

"Where as Loki is sure to give you a puppy," Clint said, raising an eyebrow. "How did that go over, when you used Odinson?"

"Not well. I no longer use it in front of Loki."

Pepper glared at Clint. "Can we stay on topic here? Missing people, a *little* more important."

Clint put his hands up in defeat and leaned back into the couch as Steve sat up straight to glance around at the group. Over all, everyone seemed less worried once they knew where the three of them had gone. The one exception was Pepper.

"Mrs. Smith..." Steve began.

"Please, call me Pepper," she said, polite even under pressure.

"Pepper. I am sure they are okay. If Thor is there, things will be fine," he said, smiling weakly.

Pepper looked at him, her stress deflating ever so slightly. "I hope you're right. I really hope you're right."

Meanwhile, things were not fine.

"He *still* won't see me?!" Tony shouted at Thor. They had been there for two days of nothing happening. Well, a lot happened in Loki's room, just nothing in terms of a court case.

"Tony, the Allfather is the King of the realm. He will see you when he wishes," Thor responded defensively from the doorway. With a huff of frustration, Tony threw himself on top of the lounging Loki.

The god let out a gasp as the man crushed all the air out of him. "Anthony," he wheezed, "Please desist in being so childish."

"Shut up and be my ice pack."

Thor spared the couple a tired smile. "If it eases your mind, I shall speak to my father again today." He left the room, then paused to peek back around the door frame. "Another matter," he said. "Mother wishes to be introduced to you, Anthony."

Tony twisted up from Loki's chest and gaped at the now empty doorway. "She does!? Wait, Thor," he shouted as he scrambled to remove himself from the mess of limbs around him. "Get back here, you enigmatic bastard!"

"Tony..."

Tony shuddered to a stop at the use of his nickname. Loki only used it in special cases and it always made him listen.

That and a few other things.

Tony turned and saw the god smiling up at him affectionately. He flopped back down, causing Loki to groan again. "Ugh, Anthony, you are no gentle weight."

"Are you calling me fat?" he asked into the god's chest. "Also, don't switch back to 'Anthony' so fast. Let me enjoy 'Tony' a little longer."

There was a long quiet moment before Loki spoke again. "I am eager to introduce you to my mother," he said, yet frowned as he thought,

*Would Anthony behave well enough? I have no problem with his behavior most of the time, but what if he does something rude in front of her?
I do not want mother to dislike him.*

"Lokes, I have an important question," Tony said, interrupting his thoughts.

"Hmm?"

Tony rose on his elbows to look Loki in the eye. His face serious, he asked, "What am I going to wear?"

Loki looked at him thoughtfully. "That is actually a good question. I assume she will be meeting you at Thor's 'Welcome Home' banquet tonight." He furrowed his brow. "You should be dressed in Asgardian clothing for such an event."

Tony tensed and tried to flash his usual grin. "Oh goody, I love dressing up for company."

Loki wasn't fooled. "Tony," he said, reaching up and running his hands up and down Tony's arms. "It will be similar to those horrid events you always host for your company."

"That's supposed to relax me?"

Loki tsked and fell back into the bed. "If you continue acting so pathetically, I am sure you will meet everyone's expectations *flawlessly*."

Tony glared halfheartedly at the god before sitting up and rolling off of him. "Thanks for the vote of confidence. You're just afraid I'll embarrass you in front of your mommy."

"Admittedly, a little."

Tony snapped back, "Not helping!" He continued to glare at the god for a few moments, before demanding, "Do something helpful and find me some Asgard furs to wear. I want to look dazzling in front of your mom."

Loki snorted at the thought and launched himself out of the bed. "Follow me."

It turned into a fierce battle between the two. Tony refused to let the god simply magic the clothing on to him, opting for taking what Loki created and dressing himself. Loki wanted to dress Tony up in a much more glamorous outfit than Tony would ever allow. Though at first he simply refused to even put the clothing on, a single look from the god was all it took to have him dressing hastily. He paraded around the room in the outfit for a while, just to appease the pouty Loki.

"You can't tell me these aren't sequins," Tony said, running his fingers over the sparkly vest.

Loki came close and repeated the action, causing a shiver to run through Tony's body. "I can not say, as I do not know what a 'sequin' is," Loki murmured.

"Ugly."

"Then perhaps these are the same."

"I'm glad you agree." Tony said before lifting the hideous thing over his head. "Now, can I change into something less 'Musical Theater' and more 'Hamlet'?"

Loki circled Tony like a shark before conjuring a simple red and gold tunic. He handed it over and waited for the mortal to dress. A black vest was added and the pants changed from loose fitting

black trousers to leather. Loki paused to admire Stark's leather clad bottom before turning the man around and attaching something across his chest.

"What is this?" asked Stark. "A necklace?"

Loki smiled slyly. "A collar, to let everyone know you belong to me."

"What?!" Tony gaped down at the gold crescent that fell across his chest. He had seen it before.

Oh. That gold thing that's always around Loki's neck.

Tony glanced back up at the god, his cheeks now flushed. "You adorable bastard."

"It is the best way to..." Loki started, choosing his words carefully. "Mmm. Ward off unwanted attention."

"So we are going to be wearing coordinated outfits?" Tony asked with a sneer. "Damn, Lokes, you're such a woman."

Loki growled and pulled Stark roughly against him. His lips hovered inches away from Tony's. "You should know by now, I am no woman." Pressing his lips closer, Loki whispered, "Or do I need to show you, again?"

Tony chuckled, his breath mingling with the god's. "It always helps to have visual aid."

"BROTHER!"

"Oh, *come on!*" shouted Tony, breaking away from Loki to glare at the finely dressed blond. Thor had somehow manage to pull off "musical theater" and still look masculine.

The sparkly god looked abashed and shuffled his feet nervously. "My apologies," Thor said, looking downwards. "But the banquet is starting soon."

"We will be along shortly," Loki said with a smirk. Not willing to argue with his brother, Thor mumbled something and left them to it. They turned to one another and kissed slowly, attempting to continue where they left off. Soon after, Tony broke the kiss and leaned back, making a face.

"Nope," he said sadly. "'Music Man' killed the mood. Let's go eat."

They entered the dinning hall as discreetly as possible, Loki making a point of scoping out the room first. When he noticed that Thor had invited all of his friends, they proceeded with caution to the far end of the table.

Unfortunately, Thor spotted them as they slinked past and waved them over. "BROTHER! TONY! Join us!"

Tony glanced at his lover and muttered out of the corner of his mouth, "What part of '*Your friends hate us and want to kill us*' does Thor not understand?"

Loki chuckled bitterly and nudged him along the length of the table. The other group idly stood as they waited for dinner, drinks in hand. Fandal had a smug look on his face as he watched them approach.

"I see you dressed your pet monkey up for the party," he addressed Loki. "Does he do any tricks?"

"Fandal," warned Thor before smiling apologetically at Tony. Tony didn't smile back.

"Thor, was this not to be a royal family event?" Loki asked, looking around the group with a bored expression. "What are they doing here?"

Sif tensed up when Fandal laughed obnoxiously. Several servants and a few straggling extended family members glanced at the group.

"A royal family event?" Fandal's smirk widened. "Then should you not be excluded, *Laufeyson*?"

Loki visibly stiffened and a distinct chill filled the air. The hall grew painfully silent as more outsiders shifted closer in an attempt to hear better. Thor stared in horror at his friend, refusing to look at Loki.

Loki slowly turned his head towards his older brother and uttered a wordless growl.

The thunderer flinched and forced himself to glance at Loki's eyes before looking down. "Brother... I only told him out of need. After I thought you dead, I had to speak to someone about it," he said, lifting his head to look at his once close friend. Thor continued, his voice heavy with disappointment. "I trusted you, Fandal. Why would you do such a thing, to my own brother?"

Fandal was starting to become annoyed at the amount of hostility around him. He ignored Thor's question and turned once again to Loki. "So, Loki, why don't you show us your true form?" He snickered and raised a goblet in salute. "Show everyone how we have an enemy in our midst."

"He's not some cheap clown act, you limp dick." Tony said, stepping from Loki's side to move closer to the bearded god. "If you want to be entertained, why don't you go *fuck* yourself?"

"Oh ho!" Fandral chortled, taking a sip of his drink. "So your little monkey already knew of your secret. What does that make him? Only a monster can love a monster."

Tony clenched his teeth and stepped closer before Loki's hand touched his shoulder gently. He stopped moving at the god's touch but continued to threaten Fandral with his eyes. "As far as I can see it, the only monster in this room is you." Tony said with a growl. "Now back off."

"Or what?"

"Or I'll fucking *burn you alive*."

"Tony!" Thor shouted in surprise. Sif glanced between the arguing men and tried to pull Fandral back. The bearded god simply brushed her off and leaned down into Tony's face.

"Need I remind you, little mortal, that I am a god?" he whispered venomously. "You ought to know your place."

Tony flashed a nasty smile. "I know my place," he said, lifting his left hand a little. "It's right here in your fucking face."

With that he flicked something at Fandral's face and stepped backwards. The god screeched as the small object exploded on his cheek. Tony quickly flicked a few more, sending the startled god backwards into his group of friends. He kept doing it until the entire group, including Thor, were cowering behind a pillar.

Tony laughed loudly and placed his hands on his hips. "Go to hell! And tell them the monkey sent you!"

Loki bent down and whispered with a hint of amusement, "You were not supposed to use magic here. We may be in greater danger now thanks to that. Although," he said, squeezing Stark's shoulder gently, "I am sure we can take care of him with ease."

Tony simply smiled and pulled out a little box from his pocket. "Not magic, my dear, but science," he said in a cheerful tone. He flicked a few more tiny bits at the pillar and chuckled as they snapped and exploded. "Actually, they're just toys."

Thor peeked out, looking like one of those large dogs who hid from kittens. "Tony, please desist in throwing the magic snaps!" he begged, then ducked behind the pillar again. Tony was about to

respond when a loud laugh burst through the room.

Wait, I know that laugh, he thought.

Tony turned to see his lover doubled over and shaking, his arms wrapped around his belly. Regardless of the audience, Loki continued to laugh uncontrollably, startling everyone in the room. No one had ever seen the god laugh like that, not even Tony. His usual response was refined and quiet. That, or the occasional, villainous and maniacal one he used when he won at the video games they played together. Tony had made Loki laugh pretty hard a few times, but never like this.

Now Tony simply beamed at his boyfriend. He couldn't help it. This was now at the top of his list of 'Cutest Loki Moments'. Right above the squirrel impersonation and that time he had made the god drink three espresso shots in a row. He shifted closer as Loki sat on one of the chairs to catch his breath. There was a moment of panting before the god began to giggle again, hiding his face behind his hands.

"Lokes?"

Tony plopped down into a chair next to him. Loki glanced through his fingers with watery eyes. Tony grinned at him, only to send the god into another fit of laughter.

"Loki?" a gentle voice inquired from across the hall. Loki immediately snapped his mouth shut and looked up, his eyes still brimming with tears. A woman dressed in white and gold stood by the doorway, looking unsure of who it was she was speaking to. Tony knew who she was before anyone spoke a word.

"Mother..." Loki said, in a sad yet affectionate voice.

Frigga smiled warmly at her dark-haired son and came forward, her arms outstretched. Loki immediately jumped from his chair and hugged her tightly, clinging to her as if she would disappear. Tony didn't usually get emotional over things that weren't about himself. He had to admit, his eyes were slightly more wet than they had been a moment ago. It was just so obvious how much Loki loved his mother. The god had gone from a towering ice prince, to a giggling mess, to a loving child in a matter of moments.

"Loki," Frigga said, her voice weak with overflowing emotion. "My son. *Oh*, how I have missed you!"

Loki seemed unable to speak, burying his face further into his mother's shoulder. Tony chuckled at the "mamma's boy".

My Lokes, so cute, he thought.

At the sound of his laugh, Frigga looked up and locked eyes with Tony. He nearly flinched, in the fear of offending her by simply existing. The she smiled and it was most loving, warm smile Tony had seen in a long time.

She was so... motherly.

Tony's eyes snapped away from her, attempting to hide the sickening waves of sadness that suddenly washed over him. He hadn't felt this badly about his own mother in a very long time. Not since high school, when the girl he was dating asked to meet his mom like it was the next inevitable step. When he explained that his mother was dead, the girl gave him a pitying look. It disgusted him and hurt him at the same time. Of course he missed his mom, he had loved her more than anyone; but no one pitied Tony Stark. They didn't last long after that, especially when the girl kept trying to 'adopt' him into her family. It was creepy.

A hand touched his own and he jerked back instinctively. Loki was looking down at Tony, shocked at his lover's reaction.

"Anthony?" the god asked, hesitantly reaching out again. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing, Lokes," Tony replied hastily. "Just a little worried about the third musketeer over there."

Frigga entered Tony's line of sight and frowned. "If you are referring to Fandral," she said with obvious distaste, "He will be dealt with. Neither of you shall have any further trouble from him."

"O-oh, um." Tony forced himself to look her in the eye. "Thank you."

Frigga smiled again, a hint of confusion on her face. "I have yet to introduce myself, my apologies." She held out a hand to Tony. "I am Lady Frigga, Loki and Thor's mother; Odin's wife."

Tony stumbled from his seat and took her hand. Loki was pleasantly surprised when Stark managed to gracefully bow and kiss Frigga's hand gently.

"It is an honor to meet you," Tony said with sincerity. "My name is Tony Stark."

She chuckled faintly and turned her gaze once more to her son. "Loki, was that your laughter I heard as I came in? It seems to have been caused by Sir Stark."

Loki looked mortified. It was the most open expression Tony had seen on him since they got here.

Well, with a few notable exceptions during their more active nights.

"I, mother, I am sorry," Loki began before Frigga held a hand up to stop him.

She looked slightly peeved at her son's foolish apology. "My dear, never apologize for laughter."

"Even if it's maniacal laughter?" Tony asked.

Loki's half-dazed look disappeared with a snap. "*Stark!*"

Tony flinched at the use of his last name and began to mutter an apology before Frigga burst out laughing. It was pleasant and gentle, but it caused an ache in Tony's heart. When she managed to control herself, she looked at Tony, her eyes sparkling with amusement.

"*Epecially* for maniacal laughter," she said before chuckling again.

Tony stared at her in awe and thought,
Oh, I like her.

"MOTHER!" came the tell-a-tale shout from across the hall. Thor greeted her exuberantly, but gave her a surprisingly gentle hug. He then began to explain to her what had happened between his friends and Loki, pulling her away from the table to speak more privately. While Frigga's attention was captured elsewhere, Loki sat in the vacant chair next to Stark and slid his hand into Tony's.

"Tony," Loki said with concern. "You are not alright. Was it what Fandral said?"

"No...well, yes. But that's not what's bugging me right now." Tony groaned and looked away from his lover. "It's your mom."

Loki tensed, his hand squeezing Tony's. "You dislike my mother?"

"NO!" Tony's head snapped around, waving a hand desperately. "No, no,no! *I adore* your mom. It's just that... she reminds me of some things I don't like to think about."

"What do you mean?"

Tony glanced around at the slowly filling banquet hall. Now was really not the time to talk about this, but Loki was so hard to say no to.

"My mom," he said. "She reminds me a lot of my mom. Same warmth, same smell, same weird

sense of humor."

Loki frowned and squeezed Tony's hand once more, his thumb running in small circles across the back. "You feel a sadness, then, when you see my mother?" he asked, looking crestfallen at the thought.

"A little," Tony responded honestly. "But it's more like an ache for something I don't have anymore. A mix up of happy because I just met your favorite person, and sad because she stirs up painful memories."

"*One* of my favorite people."

Tony blinked. "Hmm?"

"She is *one* of my favorite people," Loki said, giving Stark a pointed look. "There are more than one."

"Wait," Tony started to grin. "Am I on that list somewhere?"

"But of course."

"How high up? Am I number two?"

"Try eight."

"Eight!?" shouted Tony, putting his free hand over his mouth. "And here I thought I *meant* something to you."

With that, Loki leaned forward and muttered into his ear. "I jest. You are fighting for the number one spot."

"I can't fight your mother." Tony mumbled back. "That's not even fair. She would kick my ass."

Loki chuckled and leaned back into the chair, ignoring the eavesdropping servants that appeared around them to place platters of food on the table.

"Then we shall move her to a different list entirely," Loki said, snagging a grape from one of the passing plates. Tony smiled and scooted his chair closer to the table, glad for the distraction of food. After several minutes of snagging fruit from one another, Frigga arrived to shoo Loki out of the seat next to Tony. She sat between them and spent the rest of the banquet talking about Loki. Frigga told her best and most embarrassing stories of Loki as a kid. Tony listened eagerly, saving

information away for later use. He then did his fair share of story telling as well, explaining some of his and Loki's more elaborate pranks. She looked thoroughly pleased that her son was keeping himself entertained on Midgard. The food was excellent and the mood had grown cheerful after the removal of Fandral. Thor kept the rest of his friends on his far side, away from Loki and Stark.

As the meal drew to a close, the doors opened and Odin walked in. He could be no one else. His presence alone was enough to tell you what he was. King Odin had come, and a respectful silence followed.

Tony took an immediate disliking to the man. Something about his posture, something about that attitude.

*Maybe I just have a thing against fathers, he thought.
Or is it eyepatches?*

“Greetings, my family,” Odin spoke, addressing the room. “We welcome home my son, Thor after a year away from home.” He turned to Loki. “We also welcome home my son, Loki. It has been a long time and we thought you dead. I am glad that it is not so.”

Loki looked as if someone had pissed in his Cheerios. Tony snuck his hand under the table and gave his lover's hand a quick squeeze before thinking to him,

“Calm down, Lokes. Just pretend he's a garden gnome. A pirate garden gnome.”

Loki did his best, but failed to stifle a small snort. Frigga glanced at him, eyebrow raised, before she noted Stark's hand under the table. She suddenly beamed at Tony before turning back to her husband.

Not noticing Loki's reaction, Odin continued, “We also welcome the first mortal to our realm in many years.” He gestured to Tony, causing every eye to turn to him. Tony flashed a grin and imagined them all naked. There was a dramatic pause before the Allfather spoke again, his tone somber. “Today is a day of festivities, but tomorrow we must convene over an important matter.”

Tony felt his mood drop six hundred feet into hell.

“Tomorrow, we hold the trial for Loki Odinson.”

Guilty

Chapter Summary

A promise of golden apples and a trial.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Loki woke to the sound of quiet laughter in his room. Even while half asleep he could still recognize Tony's chuckle, but was uncertain who the other two voices belonged to. That is, until a loud booming laugh rang throughout the room, shortly followed by a chorus of hushing sounds.

Why í sorglegt nafni Óðins is Thor in my room?

Loki wearily opened his eyes to seek out those who woke him from his slumber. Through the doorway that connected the sitting room to his bedroom, Loki could see half of Tony's back on one side of the table and Thor and Frigga sitting on the other. His eyes widened as he watched an unfamiliar scene unfold in front of him. Oblivious of his watchful eyes, the group continued to talk in hushed voices. They laughed and told stories while Frigga and Thor shared fruit. Loki followed Stark's interactions with his mother, pleasantly surprised at how well they got along.

I have never had this before.

The family I always sought out.

Is this what my family would look like?

Almost on cue, Tony stopped listening to Thor and turned to look directly into Loki's eyes.

"Hey you," thought Tony. "Don't just lay there and watch us, you creep."

Loki smiled slowly and nuzzled his face back into the pillow.

"Thank you for the invitation, but I do not have the energy to deal with Thor this early in the morning."

Tony thought back, *"He's actually being kinda helpful about the trial today. Shocking, isn't it?"*

"My brother, helpful?" Loki responded. He scoffed and sat up in bed.

Frigga noticed her son slithering out of bed and had started to say good morning, but was interrupted by Thor snapping his head around and shouting, "BROTHER!"

Loki flinched and wrapped a green velvet robe around his body as he approached the table. "Quiet," Loki snapped. "It is far too early to listen to your obnoxious voice."

Tony snickered and raised his eyebrows at Frigga. "Someone's a grumpy-wumpy in the morning. Usually he's better than this," he said, leaning over and pretending to whisper behind his hand. "Usually he sets Thor's Pop-Tarts on fire."

"That was *one* time, Anthony," responded Loki, sitting himself down next to his lover with a shrug. Thor was already sagging in his chair at the memory, looking at the bowl of fruit in front of him as if it could magically transform into his favorite breakfast pastry.

"So, Thor, I heard you were being helpful for once?" Loki asked, wrapping the robe around himself tighter and absentmindedly fidgeting with the tassel. Thor glanced up from his attempts at Pop-Tart magic and looked at his brother in confusion.

Loki cast his eyes upward. "About the trial today?"

"Oh! Yes, I was telling him of our customs and what he will be expected to say."

Frigga leant forward to interject, "What do you mean you 'heard' of Thor's helpfulness?"

Loki rubbed his eyes and muttered, "Anthony told me."

"I did not hear him speak of it," she said, confused.

"Uh." Tony glanced at his lover and back to Frigga. "Lokes? I don't think she knew about the Mind Link yet."

Loki's hand froze in mid eye-wipe, turning to face Stark. His lips pressed into a thin line in annoyance. Tony was about to say something when he noticed a furious blush crawl its way across the god's face. He bit his tongue and decide to enjoy the moment a little longer. After a few moments of blank staring, it was apparent that Loki had stopped breathing.

"Thor!" Frigga chirped, looking eagerly at her blond son. "Does this mean...?"

"Yes, mother," Thor said with a wide grin. "They are soul mates."

"That is wonderful news! Why have you not told me this before, Loki?"

Loki stared at his mother as though she had grown tusks. "I was..."

"Being a bashful dwarf," interrupted Tony. Frigga furrowed her brow and chuckled.

"Dwarfs are anything but bashful," she said, sounding bemused. "They are short, violent creatures who dislike everyone equally."

"Ah, I see," Tony said, looking mildly deflated. "Another childhood story, ruined."

Loki cleared his throat. "Mother," he mumbled. "I was going to tell you after the trial."

"It is perfectly alright," she said with a knowing smile. "I had a feeling there was something more than friendship between the two of you."

Loki's response was drowned out by loud, wet chewing sounds from across the table. Thor had gone hungry long enough, and was now digging into the fruit bowl with unrivaled gusto. Loki wrinkled his nose as flecks of fruit juice and spit sprayed forth from his brother's mouth. Tony, meanwhile, was more interested in the four golden apples sitting amongst the more average looking fruit. He reached out while everyone's attention was on Thor, and plucked one from the bowl. He started to examine it carefully.

Is this some sort of fancy 'Golden Delicious'? he thought, running his fingers along the fruit.

It can't be THE golden apples.

Why would they just be sitting here in a bowl?

Well, only one way to find out.

When he could no longer hold back his curiosity, he lifted the fruit to his lips to take a bite.

"NO!" Bother Frigga and Thor jumped forward to stop Tony. The apple fell from his hands and bounced off the table.

"Oh, sorry." Tony smiled sheepishly as a flash of irritation crossed Loki's face. Frigga did not fail to miss Loki's lack of response to Stark's near miss.

"Loki," she said quietly. "Why do we not choose your outfit for the trial together?"

Loki frowned at his mother and stood, offering an arm to her as she joined him. She gave him a stern look once they reached his closets.

"Loki..." she said softly, touching his arm to stop him. "You know better than to do that."

"I did nothing wrong. If Stark eats an apple by accident, it is solely his responsibility."

"You *know* that is untrue," Frigga responded, frowning at her son. "If your father found out, both of you would be in trouble. There are ways to go about it and certain rules that must be followed. There is also the fact that he would need to eat another apple in a few years. Odin will not allow him this if your lover 'accidentally' becomes immortal."

"I know, mother." Loki spoke quietly, his fingers picking at the fabric of a black tunic that hung from one of the many pegs in the closet. "I know Odin will never allow it. I am not even his son; I doubt he would let my mortal lover join me in eternity. I'm surprised that I am even allowed it anymore."

He glanced away from his mother and moved down the line of clothes. "I just wanted a chance. Even a small one." Loki shifted a few green jackets and vests aside until he reached the end of the closet. There, in the far back, was a long red tunic that came with a dark vest. He smiled at it, fondly remembering the similar outfit he constructed for Stark. With a chuckle, he magicked the red outfit on, matching the vest with a pair of dark pants and thigh-high boots. Loki turned to his mother with a smile, completing his outfit with a flourish. The usual gold crescent met with small circular plates to hold his cloak in place.

"Not your usual colors, love," Frigga said, tilting her head to one side. "I can see who inspired you."

"I could use a little inspiration to get through this."

"You will do fine, Loki," Frigga said, reaching forward to tuck a loose strand of hair behind her son's ear. "You have people who love and care about you. One who has traveled far from his realm just to speak for you." With a chuckle she pulled her son behind her to rejoin the others.

At some point, Stark had pulled out a small magnifying glass and was examining a slice of the golden fruit. Thor looked up, almost guiltily. "He wanted to investigate it more," Thor muttered. "So I sliced it for him."

Loki looked down at his lover, shaking his head. "Stark, where did you even keep that thing? What could you possibly gain from looking at the fruit?"

Tony held up a finger and jotted something down on a piece of parchment. The paper was already covered with messy notes and small, blotted drawings. After a few more pokes and a good amount of sniffing, Tony looked up from the fruit.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" he finally responded, grinning. "I can see a lot with this. It's not your average looking glass."

"What is he doing?" Frigga asked quietly.

Loki clicked his tongue. "He's applying his 'science' to magic, *yet again*."

Thor nodded sadly, watching Tony jot down more notes. "Yes, my lady Jane is very much the same in this matter. She spent days studying Mjölnir while ignoring my offers of company."

Loki met his brother's eyes, and for the first time in many years he felt an understanding grow between them.

Scientists.

Tony muttered something before he stood and ran over to Loki's stash of papers. Loki glared at his lover's back, biting back a rain of nasty comments. The trial was in less than an hour, and Stark was having fun.

Frigga touched Loki's back gently and said, "We will leave you two alone for a bit. I will be here to escort you to the hall when it is time. "

"Thank you, mother," Loki said with a smile. He gave his brother a quick nod and turned to watch

Tony scribble a while longer. Sometime this morning, Stark had found his original clothing and dressed himself in the old T-shirt and jeans once more. Loki watched with amusement as his lover got ink all over his hands. As annoying as Stark's obsessions could be, the man was so adorable at times.

"Lokes." Tony's voice stirred Loki from his thoughts. The man stepped up in front of him suddenly, him holding some papers.

"Yes?"

"Why didn't you stop me from eating the apple?"

Loki chuckled and slipped his arms around Tony's waist. "Perhaps because I find no reason to be troubled if you somehow manage to become immortal."

"You want to be with me forever?" Tony asked, wriggling his eyebrows suggestively. "That's a long time, sweet-cheeks. Forever listening to my music, forever massaging my back, forever..." Tony stopped, losing all signs of humor in an instant.

"What is it?" Loki tightened his arms around Stark's waist.

"Can I even do it? Even if it was allowed, with this thing," he tapped the arc reactor, "Could I be immortal? Would I have to live forever with this metal crap in my damn chest?"

Loki looked at him thoughtfully, a hint of sadness in his eyes. Truthfully, he did not know what would happen if Stark ate the apple. Thor had expressed his fears of the trials one must face before being granted permission to join the immortals. Thor feared that his lady love would not be suited for the tasks, or even that she would refuse his offer outright.

Did Anthony want to be immortal?

Would he go through the trials, follow all rules until he bested Odin at his game?

Stark did not put a lot of time and effort into things that held no interest for him....

"I take it from your emo silence, that's a no," Tony said, growing more miserable.

"I cannot say for sure what will happen," Loki replied, pressing his nose against Stark's in a soft, loving manner. "I do know that, to gain the apple, one must follow certain rules. It is something of a game played between the gods and mortals. There are only four who have won in all the years of our written history."

Tony looked like he was going to throw up. "I thought..." He stopped, swallowing back the nausea. "I thought maybe I could just ask him. I didn't realize it was such a big thing."

"It should not be. There is no reason for such ridiculous ceremony." Loki sighed and pressed his lips against Tony's forehead, waiting for him to relax before speaking again. "One thing at a time, love. For now, you need to dress for the trial."

Tony groaned and leaned back to pout at Loki. "How dare you ruin the moment by reminding me of that? I was trying my damndest not to stress out." He started scratching at his ink-stained hands. "This is going to go badly. You know how I am. How many times have I said something that's pissed you off in the past few months?"

"Only a handful of times."

"That's a handful more than I'm comfortable with," Tony responded, clenching his finger in the red fabric of Loki's sleeves. He glanced down at them and suddenly stepped back, looking at his lover's outfit.

"Oh my god. Lokes, I love it! You in red..." Tony hummed in appreciation.

Loki tried, and failed, to keep the smile from his face. "It appeals to you?"

"*Appeals*"? I could eat you up right now."

"That will have to wait. You need to dress now."

Tony eyed the god thoughtfully, failing to form any sort of rational response. After a moment his head snapped up.

"Dress me in green."

Loki was to go in first, alone. Tony held onto him for a long time before he at last relented and let the god go. Loki felt all the residual warmth of Stark's body leave him as the gold doors closed behind him. Walking into the center of the room, he fidgeted with the red leather strap on his sleeve to remind himself that he was not truly alone.

As tall as Loki was, he was dwarfed by the vastness of the room. The benches that held his jury and judges towered over him, with Odin's chair standing highest.

So needlessly dramatic.

"Loki, son of Odin and Frigga, brother to Thor.," intoned a man from one of the tiers.

Loki bowed his head ever so slightly in acknowledgment, refusing to grant anyone the proper bow.

The man continued, "You stand here, convicted of several accounts of attempted murder. You are being tried for the events listed in Midgardian years as 2010. You are also here for your attempts at taking over the throne on the same date."

Odin snapped at the man, "Strike the final part from the trial. I already cleared that conviction as a misunderstanding."

Loki stared up at Odin in surprise. All his practiced expressions and carefully tutored emotions fell apart.

Why would he do me this favor?

What did he gain from removing that from my trial?

Even if it is true, I did not steal the throne...

"Loki," Odin said, addressing his son. "I must first ask you, how do you plead?"

"I plead guilty of my actions on that date, but not for attempted murder."

A murmur traveled through the crowd at this. Odin cast a one-eyed glare at the jury. "What do you mean?" he asked, leaning forward in his heavily ornate chair.

"What I mean, Allfather, is that I admit my actions were rash at the time." Loki paused, trying to carefully word his thoughts. "I never meant to truly harm anyone. You know as well as I that my attempts were merely to shape Thor into a better suited king. I acknowledge that I harmed my brother and many others in my moment of madness. But any harm done was purely accidental."

"Accidental does not mean you are without consequences. You also went against my wishes and destroyed an entire realm, killing millions. How do you plead to that, Loki?"

"I did as any warrior of Asgard would do. I simply fought a battle, and won. So for such a crime as following in my *father's* footsteps, I plead guilty."

A silence followed his statement, the jury expecting more from Loki.

"You have changed, my son," Odin said, sounding almost curious.

"I have had much reason to change. Although," Loki said with a small smile. "I do not think I have changed all that much."

Odin's lips twitched at this comment. The jurors shifted in their seats, becoming confused and restless.

"That will be all for now." Odin spoke to the room. "We will meet again in an hour's time to hear from the mortal."

Loki threw himself into Tony's arms the second the doors closed behind him.

Frigga let out a squeak and attempted to stifle a laugh. "Loki! Someone might see..."

"I do not care one bit," Loki grumbled into Tony's shoulder.

"I suppose that is alright," she responded with a smile. "You two sit over here and relax before they call Sir Stark in. I shall go find Thor since he is sure to be off sulking somewhere."

They sat in silence for some time, Loki leaning his head on Stark's shoulder while the shorter man wrapped one arm around him. It wasn't entirely comfortable, but it didn't matter at the moment. After a while, Tony started placing gentle kisses atop the god's head. He continued downward until he cupped Loki's head in his hand, kissing his lips. It was a soft kiss, and quiet, and it held more meaning than any other kiss that had come before. Finally, Tony leaned back to look up and down his lover's face before settling his gaze on the green eyes. He gave the god a faint smile and said softly, "It'll be fine, Lokes. My little Smurf. My Gonzo. My squer—"

"If I agree with you, will you shut up?"

"No, probably not," Tony said with a more sincere smile. "Did I distract you enough?"

"Asking if you distracted me simply reminds me of the problem you wished to distract me from."

"So that's a 'no'?"

Loki jabbed a finger into Stark's forehead. "You figure it out."

"Hey! I'm the genius here," Tony said, reaching up and rubbing his head. "Also, *ow*."

"Sir Stark?" inquired a wheedling voice from a few feet away. Looking up, Tony spotted a skinny young man with hair so light blond it was nearly white. Tony decided he would name him Weevil.

"Yes?" he said, thinking, "*Weevil*."

Loki choked and turned to face the wall, covering his mouth to keep all sound from coming out. The messenger glanced nervously at the shaking god and took a step back before speaking. "Sir, you are needed in the hall. The trial is to begin once more."

"Whatever you say," Tony said as he stood and adjusted his long green jacket. "*Weevil*."

There was an audible snort from the alcove where he left Loki.

*Good. If I can still make him laugh, he's not too far gone.
Now let's see if I can amuse the court.*

"Anthony, Son of Stark."

Oh, not this again.

"Yep," Tony responded, keeping his voice calm. "That's me."

Odin gave him a withering look. "You are here to speak in defense of Loki. Please take this seriously."

"I am, sir," Tony said, losing what was left of his fake charm. "This is how I talk."

A man in the jury coughed and spoke up. "You may start with your explanation of the most recent events in your city of York."

Tony grimaced and ran a hand through his hair.

"How about we start with something a little further back, shall we?" he said, looking up at the Allfather. "Let's start with a little explanation about the void that you let your son fall though?"

"We are not here to speak of such things. No one can vouch for what happened during his time there." Odin frowned as though only mildly disappointed at Tony's wording.

Tony stood up straighter. "I can."

"How?"

"I saw something from the void myself. There is something out there, in the darkness," Tony began, feeling a chill crawl through his bones. "It's old, it's nasty, and it's bored."

The silence grew long and all too familiar for comfort. Tony cleared his throat and began to explain how many times he'd died, and how Loki brought him back every time. He explained the research he did into the god's eye color, and what it meant. Tony carefully left out the most painful things, and the most personal. Namely, their relationship.

"We were told that Loki was aware of his actions while he attacked Midgard."

"He was, sort of," Tony said, losing all patience. "Look, it's like when you take drugs."

Some of the jurors raised eyebrows in confusion.

"Okay, you guys clearly don't do that here. How about," Tony grinned. "Ale."

That got him grimaces and a few knowing looks directed down the benches toward a man at the end. He looked, admittedly, a little drunk.

"Say this person just went through a lot of shit, right?" Tony looked Odin directly in the eye. "So you want to feel better. What do you do? You drink. Why? Because it makes you forget, you feel happy, the world gets brighter. Now all your troubles are melting away. Everyone knows that drinking makes you do stupid things." Tony flashed a grimace of his own. "I, myself, can vouch for that 100%. Anyway, there you are, in a stupid dazed state. You're mostly aware of what you're doing, but you do it anyway. This is what happened, Loki got drunk off his ass so he could forget his troubles. Then add a dash of false sympathy, a little bit of magic, and you've got a Thanos cocktail."

Odin was giving him a look that clearly read, "I am doing my best to understand you, but I simply cannot."

Tony spoke slower and louder. "Loki was used, abused, and confused. No? Still not..." He grumbled and started again. "He got told all the things a hurting god needed. Plus there was a little mind control. Anyway, wasn't the point of me being here to explain how much he's changed?"

"Has he changed?" asked Odin, leaning forward once more, glad to be back on familiar ground.

"A little, yeah. But probably not in the way you mean." Tony chuckled. "I get the feeling he's more like he used to be. Blindly jumping in to help people, while still being terrified of betrayal. He would do anything to save your life, but he won't treat you kindly. Not after what he's been through." Tony stopped and met Odin's single eye once again. "So, has he fundamentally changed? No. I think he's the same kid you may remember, Odin."

"Perhaps..." Odin said quietly. The king continued, addressing the room more loudly. "We shall join now in the lesser hall to discuss the case. Son of Stark, please leave the hall until we call for you once more."

Tony bowed low to the king and nearly ran from the room. Once outside, he spotted Loki sitting with Thor, and bolted across the hallway to him. Loki stood, looking worried. "Tony, what's wrong?"

"Bathroom. *Now*. Gotta pee. Where?!"

With a short laugh, the god gripped his arm and teleported them to another hallway. Tony dashed through a smaller set of gold doors to relieve himself. He could still hear Loki chuckling from outside.

"Oh stop it!" he yelled as he finished. "You weren't in there nearly as long."

"I also did not drink all of the tea."

"You did too. I saw you *drekka hjartanlega* tea."

Loki tilted his head, smiling to himself. "I am impressed. You are improving with speaking the old tongue."

"Don't be too impressed," Tony said as he came through the doors to greet his lover. "Thor said it so many times to me. Except he said *öl* something."

"Ah, Ale."

"I should have known," Tony grumbled. "That bastard! Rubbing his drinking habits in my face."

Loki hooked an arm through Stark's and began to walk. After a long moment he asked, "How has my brother rubbed his drink in your face? I have yet to see him do such a thing."

"I'm not even gonna' explain that because the mental image is hilarious." Tony's laugh stopped short when he felt a prickle on the back of his neck.

Uh oh, my spidey sense is tingling.

"*Uh, Lokes...*" he thought, glancing to the side.

"*I know*," Loki thought back, his arm pulling Stark closer. "*Be patient. I wish to see who dares attempt to attack me a second time.*"

A soft snicker drifted down the hall from in front of them. If it wasn't so cliché, Tony might have actually been creeped out. Instead, using his other hand, he pulled out his box of 'magic snaps' and flicked the remaining few in the general direction of the laugh. There was a soft yelp and a thud that sounded suspiciously like a pompous ass hitting the floor.

"Sounds like Fandral," Tony said, sounding bored. "How droll."

"Droll indeed." Loki agreed. "We might as well leave, seeing as all it takes to defeat the 'mighty' Fandral are but a few children's toys."

There was a shout from behind the pillar just before they snapped back into the corridor by the meeting hall. Thor jumped a little, a small rivulet of drool still on his face.

"Thor," Tony said, placing a hand over his heart. "We were just attacked, and you were sleeping?!"

"You were attacked?!" Thor stood, his arm swinging out to call his hammer to him.

"Not really, Thor." Loki elbowed Stark in the side. "Fandral snickered at us from behind a pillar."

"Oh... I see."

"Although, his creeping around is enough to reward him with a little punishment. I also have yet to retaliate for his comments last night," Loki said, looking thoughtful.

"Set his clothes on fire?" offered Tony. Thor gave him a look. Tony shrugged.

"I think," Loki said, a smile beginning to grow. "I shall turn his entire staff of servants into sheep."

"Brother!" Thor protested. "They did nothing to you. They do not deserve a punishment."

"Won't they, y'know, get the day off?" Tony asked.

Thor relented, sitting back down in the alcove. "Yes... perhaps"

Tony frowned and looked up at the taller god beside him. Loki regarded him with confusion.

"Loki, I want you to know," Tony said, seriously. "I'll never be okay with the whole servant thing. Just so... you know."

"I do not plan on having one in our home on Earth," the god responded, chuckling.

Tony froze and tried to keep his thoughts to himself.

Our home. Our home. Our home.

Our.

Home.

"What?" he said, shaking the thought from his head.

"I said, we need to enter the hall again." Loki furrowed his eyebrows, trying to understand Tony's sudden lack of interest. Tony flashed an apologetic smile and followed his love to the doors once more. As Loki let go of his hand, he felt a weight settle in his stomach.

"*Can we talk like this in here?*" Tony thought to the god.

"*I would not suggest it. I do not wish to be found out just yet.*"

"Oh" Tony tried to hide his disappointment and faltered behind Loki as they reached the center of the room. Loki turned and grabbed Tony's hand in his, pulling him roughly to his side. Tony let out a manly squawk and ended up smashing ungracefully into the god.

"L-Lokes," he said, glancing around the room in a panic. "Didn't you just say..."

"I meant that *particular* aspect of our relationship. Everything else is fine."

Tony mumbled under his breath about holding hands in front of Odin, causing Loki to laugh. He attempted to stifle it with his other hand. Laughing at his own trial was not going to gain him any favors.

"Loki." Odin's voice boomed as they entered the room. The king looked surprised to see them both, standing together and holding hands. His eyebrows rose higher as he noticed Loki chuckling to himself. Tony found it kind of sad how everyone always looked so surprised when Loki laughed. You would think, in over a thousand years, Loki would find reasons to laugh.

"Sire," Loki said, bowing his head lower than the last time. Tony followed suit, bowing even lower just in case. He looked down at his black leather boots and vaguely wondered why people show the tops of their heads to royals as a sign of respect.

"You may rise," Odin said, sounding mildly amused. Tony jerked up, realizing he was the only one still bowing.

I'm already making an ass out of myself. I knew I would.

"We have come to a conclusion on this matter," Odin said, looking down at Loki.

Tony tensed, squeezing his boyfriend's hand tightly.

Loki thought to him with a snap, *"No matter what they decide, we are leaving. Be ready."*

Odin continued. "We find you innocent of the attempted murders of Thor and the Warriors Three. We understand that you were not attempting to harm them, and that it was purely accidental."

Tony mentally scoffed.

"We also deem you innocent of murder and harm of mortals during both attacks. I have come to an understanding thanks to Son of Stark about the most recent events on Midgard."

Loki twitched at Odin's speech, his eyes wide with surprise. He almost spoke before Odin continued once more.

"However," he said, his tone more serious. "We find you guilty of destroying the realm of the Jotunheim and all of its inhabitants. The genocide of an entire race is no light matter. For that you shall be punished."

Tony felt something inside him crackle and come alive. It hurt. He glanced over at his lover and realized it was happening to him because it was happening to Loki. The god was panicking, and streams of angry, frightened thoughts came pouring out.

He cannot punish me for-

This is a mockery, he knows-

Tony spoke to him, I spoke to him what part of-

He attacked them with intentions of slaughter-

Why?

Why?

So Tony did the one thing he knew that could calm the god down. He kissed him.

The effect was mildly hilarious. Apparently seeing a mortal not only kiss the prince, but to do it in front of the Allfather, was surprising enough to send the jury jumping out of their seats, yelling. Not to mention that said mortal was now kissing a convicted criminal. For all the outcry, neither of the two involved seemed to care. Everything else was shut off, tuned out, unimportant in the moment.

Pulling back at last, Tony gave Loki a warm smile and asked, "Think we can at least listen to your punishment before you freak out?"

"Y-yes..."

Odin had not moved from his seat but Tony made note of the furrowed brows. "Ahem. Now that we have your attention again," Odin said, sounding mildly disgusted. "I propose a punishment suitable for the crime."

Loki tensed again, but this time he put all of his energy into squeezing Stark's hand. Tony was going to be sore after, but it was better than having Loki shooting sparks at Odin.

"I wish for you to continue working with the mortals. Earn their trust once more by doing the deeds expected of their heroes." Odin smiled faintly. "I have already heard of the great things you have done to help the humans in your time on Midgard. Continue to do so for a year and perhaps when we meet again, I will consider you a truly changed man."

"Pah-ha!"

Tony gaped at his darling boyfriend. He had never, in the past few months of spending time with the god, heard that sound from Loki's lips. Nether, apparently, had Odin. Tony turned and gave the king a questioning look. After staring at one another in bemused confusion, Odin suddenly barked out a laugh.

"May I take that as an answer, my son?" Odin asked, carefully enunciating the last two words.

"Yes, I..." Loki looked up at Odin and frowned. "My apologies for laughing."

"It is quite alright," Odin said with a smile. "Never apologize for laughter."

Tony perked up at this and started to say, "What about maniacal—" before he was elbowed harshly in the gut. Loki bowed to the king and began to shuffle Tony out of the room.

"Loki," called out the Allfather. "I wish to speak to you after dinner tonight. Bring with you the Son of Stark."

Loki nodded, swallowing nervously as the door shut for the final time behind them.

Special note: You are now up to date. All updates will be as I finish them from now on. Next chapter is more of a "part two" of this one.

All Clear

Chapter Summary

Sign the all clear, all is well in Asgard. The king was lenient, cheerful even. Fandral is leaving them alone, and they are going home tonight.

Sure, like anything ever goes their way.

Chapter Notes

[My beta bailed for a bit. This WILL be edited, asap.]

NOTE: The words in Italics that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

[Disclaimer: I do not, in anyway, own these characters. All rights belong to Marvel etc.]

"Holding hands is one thing," Loki snarled at the lump under the blankets. "Kissing me in front of the Allfather and the court is another thing entirely!"

"Shut up already, you drama queen."

"*What* did you just say to me?" Loki's voice had gone cold.

Tony peeked out from the blankets and eyed the livid god with all the energy of a rock. Loki was back in his dull green sweater that he often wore on Earth, which surprised Tony. Loki seemed to be more comfortable in Midgard fashion these days.

"Lo-Lo, I just went and talked to a bunch of old, cranky men for what felt like four hours," Tony reminded him, sighing. "I'm tired and I want to sleep." The god simply crossed his arms, unimpressed. "I'm a jerk, okay. I'm sorry for telling you to shut up, but kissing you is what usually calms you down. You know, before you blew Odin up or something."

"Apparently you seem to think I have the self control of a child?" Loki snapped in response.

"Hey, I could feel it inside me. You may fool everyone else, but you can't fool me." Tony held up his fingers for visual aid. "You were this close to snapping."

"Really," snarled the god. "Pray tell, how close am I *now*, Stark?"

"Not that close at all. You're just bitchy and over tired." Tony grinned with confidence and opened his arms wide. "Come here. Let me massage you. Stop hating me."

Loki grumbled, his anger draining away easily. Tony always won the arguments this way, with bribery and clever words. He flopped face down on the bed next to Stark and stretched out all his limbs.

"I do not hate you," Loki said quietly into the blanket. "Stop thinking I do."

"I don't think you hate me, I guess. You sometimes go somewhere that I can't follow."

Loki snorted into the blanket. "What í öllum Realms gamall do you mean by that?"

Tony smiled to himself and began kneading his knuckles into Loki's shoulders. It had become a common practice between them to take turns massaging one another. Although, Tony was usually the one face down, seeing as Loki was far more talented with his hands.

"Hmm, I mean that there are times where I can't..." Tony paused, his hands drawing circles into the god's back. He wasn't sure how to explain it to someone who was technically hooked into his brain. "Sometimes I can't read you at all. You go to that dark place where I can't seem to follow you." Tony bit his lip in thought, digging his fingers into Loki's muscles distractedly. "All I can do is yell and wave my arms at you from the outside," he said quietly.

Loki turned over, disrupting Stark's massage. He narrowed his eyes at his lover, looking up at Tony thoughtfully. "I see. I did not realize how in tune you were with me," Loki said, looking a bit surprised. "I had thought it was only I who felt that way."

"Okay, my turn. What in all the magic fairy realms do *you* mean?"

"I mean, you go to a dark place as well."

"Not the same one, though. Otherwise we should be having midnight rendezvous."

Loki chuckled and leaned up, sliding his fingers through Tony's hair before letting them drift down the back of his neck. With a smirk, Loki jerked him closer quickly.

"Tony..." Loki said, his voice soft but serious. "I promise I will never go where you cannot reach me."

A lopsided smile formed on Tony's face before he gave Loki a gentle kiss. "Mmm, I guess I just need to shout louder and maybe get some sort of semaphore going."

"Semaphore is..."

"Flags, Lokes," Tony answered. "I'll wave flags at you."

"Þú ert svo skrítið..." Loki said, shaking his head. "As much as I would like to sleep away the evening with you, we must join my family for dinner once more."

"This is the last dinner here, right?" Tony asked, shedding off the last of the blankets. "Also, I am not that weird. Flag waving is an art form."

"If you say so." Loki scoffed and shifted out of his sweater and into a beautiful set of robes and armor. He went all out this time. Over a deep green robe, he wore a finely worked black leather jacket that reached the floor. His torso was decorated with small bronze swirls over a hard leather chest plate. Tony smiled, noticing the usual gold circlet gracing Loki's ensemble.

"No red tonight, handsome?" he asked, giving Loki an appreciative look.

"Not tonight, no." Loki replied, dusting off imaginary dust particles. "Since this is our last evening here, it is a much more formal meal."

"Wait, you aren't going to make me wear the sequins," Tony asked, his face contorting in horror. "Are you?"

Loki gave his lover a look and flicked a hand in his direction. Tony jumped up as he felt the crawling sensation of cloth forming over his skin.

"God dammit Loki, I said *not* to do that!"

"I can not fathom why you have such an issue with it. It is faster."

Tony glared at him, scratching at the sleeves of his tunic. "It makes me claustrophobic," he grumbled, looking down at the blue and gold outfit. "Don't make me explain that again."

Tony picked at the fabric. It was actually quite beautiful, for fancy Shakespearean clothing. The blue sleeves were embroidered with small gold leaves, each swirl of a vine ending with a flourish. He was glad, at least, that the most flowery part of the outfit was hidden by a vest and a cape that clasped at his chest.

Tony looked up and caught the god eyeing him with a hungry look.

Uh oh, it looks like we're going to have to play dress up when we get home.

"Shall we go, then?" Loki asked, offering his arm to Stark.

"Do I have to?"

"Yes."

Tony slipped his arm through Loki's and grumbled unhappily. "Can I at least make Mind Link comments on people?"

Loki leaned down and kissed the top of Tony's head affectionately.

"But of course, my love. But of course."

The meal was nothing special. The food was the same, rough and plain. Meat, vegetables, bread. The conversation was nearly as dry as the food, with the formal seating arrangement leaving Tony alone with a bunch of strangers. Thor and Loki sat on either side of the King and Queen. Although Loki looked pleased to be next to his mother, he was often caught casting glances down the table at Tony. Each time their eyes met, Tony would offer up a comment on the people around them, trying

to get the god to laugh. It turned into a childish game between them, each putting their sharp wit and snarky attitudes to the test.

"This woman has eaten twenty four grapes since the man next to her mentioned how much he liked them," Tony thought, grimacing at his own plate. "They're called seedless grapes, not shameless."

Tony felt, rather than heard, Loki's chuckle. It didn't count as a win until one of them laughed out loud.

"Thor has given enough long winded speeches to those around us to be called a zephyr."

"Are you kidding?" Tony thought back incredulously. "Have you heard the hot air coming from this guy? Arngrim, I think it was."

Loki cast a look down the table.

"I don't know what you mean by hot air. I hope you do not mean he is gassy."

Tony choked on his wine, sputtering out a laugh. Those around him looked on in disgust and concern. After he managed to compose himself, he slowly lifted his eye to meet his lover's from down the table. Loki's green eyes were sparkling with his achievement, a smug smile on his lips.

"Damn you." Tony thought with a glare. "You played on my weakness for potty humor."

Loki made an innocent face and purposely turned away to speak to his mother. Frigga caught Tony's eye and gave him an apologetic look.

Oh, at least she knows why I spontaneously spewed my drink.

The woman beside him had given up on grape man, turning her attention to the short mortal beside her. Much to Tony's dismay, she also brought the same flirting and goo-goo eyes she had been using on the other guy. Tony was polite, laughing at the right times, complimenting her hair, and avoiding saying anything about himself. He did, however, mention how he simply loved carrots. The rest of the dinner was spent in wild entertainment as the woman nearly gorged herself on the orange vegetable.

As the evening drew to a close, Tony felt all the humor drain away as Odin stood.

"I must thank you all for a pleasant feast," the kind said. "It is time for us to bid farewell to our guest and my two sons. They shall be returning to Midgard once more to take up their duties as diplomats and protectors of the realm."

Loki looked directly at Stark as thought,
"Me, a protector of your realm."

"Yes, Loki," Tony responded. "You shall be the protector of all cats in bags."

That earned him a glare, only to be distracted by Frigga touching Loki's arm.

"Now boys, if you are finished casting longing looks at one another, please join me and your father in the throne room."

Loki embarrassed, mumbled, "Yes, mother."

Tony nearly jumped from his chair to join Loki, his hands automatically reaching out for any form of contact. He had gone far too long without touching his god.

"Lokes," he whined, making grabby hands. "Please reward me for sitting all alone with grape lady."

Loki smiled a slow, appreciative smile and slipped his arms around Stark's waist. "As you wish," he said, and kissed Tony full on the lips in front of the entire table.

Thank Odin that Odin left.

Cuz I think he would be pretty pissed about Loki's tongue down my throat.

Again.

The collective gasps and a startled shriek (most likely from the grape lady), were in their own way a reward.

"Loki," he mumbled against the god's lip. "Your revenge is turning me into an exhibitionist."

"You enjoy it, do not lie."

"I never said I didn't," Tony agreed, turning to admire the shocked faces. "Oh look, I think we made the lady faint."

"We should leave, before the Allfather returns to see what is taking us so long and hears of it from them."

Tony shrugged and flashed a shit-eating grin at the guests before they both left.

Once in the hall, Loki seemed to be dragging his feet. He stopped to show Stark a tapestry, pointing out a huge gouge in a column that he apparently was the cause of. He pointed out what looked like scorch marks and proudly told the tale of how he set Thor's robes on fire.

"That's fascinating how you were always a little shit," Tony said, hooking Loki's arm with his. "But I'm pretty sure we have a grumpy pirate to entertain before we leave."

Loki allowed himself to be pulled along, a frown forming as they drew closer.

"Anthony," he began, his voice filled with discomfort. "I already *know* what this is about."

"Yeah, so do I. But if we want to go home, we have to do this." Tony looked back at his lover in concern. "You do actually want to go home with me, right?"

"I see no other place as home," Loki responded sadly. "As much as I will miss my mother, I feel most at ease there with you."

Tony smiled and reached up, brushing a stray hair out of Loki's face. "I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I wish you could stay with her longer. The pirate says stay away for a year, so we should. But I think we should visit her a day earlier than you're allowed, on purpose."

"Sometimes I wonder if you wish for me to get in trouble."

"Only if I get to be in trouble too," Tony replied, pulling Loki forward once more. "Now come on."

Let's hear the 'harm my son and I'll get the shot gun' speech'."

They reached the throne room at a slow pace, Loki still lagging behind. Ignoring the sulking god, Tony reached out to open the door, yet was stopped by a loud, angry voice reverberating from within.

"Of course they are late!" Odin shouted angrily, his voice shaking the gold doors. "He and that pathetic mortal are undoubtedly doing something... *unsavory* together."

Pathetic?

Unsavory?!

What?

Tony froze and then turned to look at Loki, mouthing, "What-The-Fuck?" Loki stared back, just as startled by his father's words as Stark. This was not the same Odin they had talked to during the day. The king's voice shook the room once again.

"Thor spoke of Midgard as though Loki's change was due to the mortals. This mate of his is utterly appalling," Odin said, shouting over Frigga's attempt to respond. "Did you hear of it, the distasteful thing he did in court today?"

Frigga, finally finding a pause, spoke icily, "You seemed to have no issue with it at the time. Why are you behaving this way now?"

There was a long moment of silence where both eavesdroppers thought the argument was over, until Odin spoke again.

"I was at first pleased that Loki was looking for redemption," he said more quietly. "Only to then be forced to watch him flounce around with that primitive being. Fandral spoke to me of their actions from the previous night. I have half a mind to change the ruling and force Loki to stay here to redeem himself."

"You wouldn't," Frigga hissed, in a way that told Stark where Loki had learned it. "He is happy with the mortal and you have no right to treat Stark like some animal. He has gone to great lengths to protect Loki. Even now, he has traveled far to an unfamiliar realm, only to be forced to suffer the abuse of ones such as Fandral. Yet he is here all the same."

"Loki does not *deserve* to be happy. He needs to see the error of his ways, not be pampered by his mother and his lover."

"Loki is still our *son*, not some foreign criminal you can just lock away." Frigga's voice softened. "You know, very well, the reasons why he does not wish to stay on Asgard."

"That is not entirely his choice," Odin snapped back, his voice rising again. "He has a duty as a prince and he should not forget the original purpose of his adoption."

Frigga's voice became choked with surprise. "What do you mean, *original purpose*?!"

"He may be our son, but he is still of Laufey," Odin said, carefully lowering his voice. "He is the only one who can be a diplomat to the other giants. He knows that part of his duties lay in his

heritage."

"They would kill him for what he has done to King Laufey. Would you truly subject him to that?"

"He must earn the trust of his people once again," Odin said anger slipping back into his voice. "Or he shall never be welcomed back as a prince of Asgard. He can do this and still keep his lineage hidden."

Tony clenched his fists so hard he felt his nails puncture the palms of his hands. He could put up with a lot of shit. Growing up listening to the same speech about how he needed to change into something better; always something better. That nobody could love him, because he wasn't good enough. How he wasn't suppose to expect love from his father. How he hung out with all the wrong people.

God, how many friends and girlfriends did I lose just because that asshole deemed them 'unworthy' of Howard Stark's son? He paid half of them off, while the other half got scared away.

Like I belonged to Stark Industries.

Here's Odin, making Loki into some tool for the kingdom.

Odin could call Tony whatever he liked, but he had no fucking right to say that Loki didn't 'deserve' to be happy. For one thing.

Loki remained silent, his body as still as a statue. The only signs of life were in his eyes, flashing a sharp, deep green. Tony knew that the darker they were, the more angry the god was. He would say Loki was about two shades away from maximum anger levels.

Inside the room, the argument continued on without them. Odin yelled something about how generous he was in that he hadn't placed Loki in a cell. Apparently, that was the last straw for Frigga, because she burst out of the room, hitting Stark in the face with a giant gold door. Tony went flying backwards, skidding across the stone floor like a cartoon character. Quickly shutting the door behind her, Frigga joined Loki in helping Tony up.

"You have my deepest apologies, Stark," she whispered, glancing back at the door. "Both for hitting you, and for the conversation you clearly just overheard."

"It's not your fault on either account," Tony replied, his hand covering his chin where a bruise was already forming. "I'm pretty weak by Asgard standards. So I'm pretty sure if you sneezed at me I would go flying."

Frigga looked at him with dark, sad eyes and shook her head. She frowned and turned to her son, putting an arm around his shoulders and pulling him into a tight hug. Tony smiled weakly and watched them with another painful tug on his heart.

"Lady Frigga," he said at last. "Could you please take Loki back to his room."

"Stark," Loki began. Tony put a hand up, instantly silencing the god.

"Stay with your mom and try to calm down. I highly doubt your being in the same room as Odin right now is going to end well for anyone."

"What are you going to do?" Frigga asked, worried.

"I'm late for a meeting with the King, I should probably arrive."

"You will not go in there without me, Tony," Loki said, breaking away from his mother's embrace.

"I will," Tony said with finality. "I'll go in there, listen to what he has to say, and then we leave. The end."

Frigga touched Tony's arm gently. "Son of Stark, do not attempt to argue with him," she said, fear now present in her eyes. "He may argue freely with me, but you he can have locked away for showing impertinence."

Tony smiled warmly at her and took Frigga's hands in his. "Don't worry, ma'am, I can be polite when the time calls for it," he said, a half smile forming on his face. "And please calm him down before he turns someone into a newt."

Tony looked back once after they split up, catching a look from Loki as they left. He attempted to smile at the god as reassuringly. It didn't work that well. Tony shook his head, trying to clear his mind.

Start out fresh.

Like you didn't hear Odin call you pathetic.

Like he didn't just treat your boyfriend like a disposable napkin.

Yeah, that's not gonna happen.

Tony pulled open one of the heavy doors, wondering for a moment just how much stronger Frigga really was than him. Odin was facing away when Tony entered, looking much more menacing from behind than should be possible. Tony coughed to gain the King's attention, though he remained by the door. Just in case he needed to run. Not that he was scared of him or anything.

Odin snapped around, his face flashing with hatred before it was replaced with a smooth smile.

"Son of Stark!" the king exclaimed, opening his arms in a welcoming gesture. "I have heard great things about you from Thor. Is it true you stopped an entire army with a single blow?"

Tony flashed his 'publicity' smile and came forward. "A few separate times, actually."

Odin looked amused at the thought, turning away to seat himself on his throne.

Of course, thought Tony. *Frigga, he can speak eye to eye to, but I have to be looked down on.*

"I expected Loki to be with you," Odin said with a hint of disappointment. "I had wished to speak to you both."

"Lokes," Tony said, purposely using the pet name. "Isn't feeling that great. I ran into the Lady Frigga in the hall and asked her to check up on him."

Odin stroked his beard, seemingly lost in thought. Tony forced himself to not comment on the fake display of thoughtfulness. Odin knew exactly what he wanted to say, and how to say it.

"I wished to speak to you about the trials involved in becoming immortal."

Tony hadn't been expecting that at all. "I... what?"

"I understand that you are something of a paramour to my son," Odin smiled, almost sweetly. "Thor has also spoken to me of his desire to have the mortal maiden as his wife."

"I see...."

"The test is not something one does in the physical realm," Odin continued. "Thor had worried that his lady would not be suitable for a battle, as I assume Loki would worry for you. I wish to make clear that the trial is within your own mind. You will be placed under a spell to sleep and travel inside your mind to prove yourself worthy of immortality."

"So," Tony asked, the gears in his brain grinding along to catch up. "I would be sort of a Demi-god? Or something else?"

"You would be more like our servants," Odin said, a hint of humor in his voice. "It is more like a spell to slow your time, than true immortality."

"So I'll still die if someone were to, say, hit me really hard?"

"No, you will be stronger and heal faster. But will not yield magic as Loki and Thor do. The immortality is a gift, even to those not of royal blood. We treat our slaves well here in Asgard," Odin chuckled darkly. "Unlike some mortals of old."

Tony's face twitched. It was obvious the king was going to try to insult Tony as much as possible, but that was just low. "Hey," he said, flashing a grin again. "At least we nipped that in the bud. You guys have, what, thousands of more years on us?"

Odin's smile slipped off his face faster than Fury on a Slip-n-Slide.

"Indeed," the king said bitterly. There was a tense silence, unspoken words hanging in the air between the two.

"I'll think about it."

"Excuse me?" Odin demanded.

"The immortality thing. I said I'll think about it."

Odin looked down at Tony in disbelief, not at all pleased with the puny mortal throwing the grandest of gestures back in his face. "You do not wish to remain with my son?"

"I do," Tony said, unable to keep a smirk from his face. "I just prefer to do it under my own terms. I'll let you know in a year." He paused and added, "If I'm not dead by then."

Odin looked like someone had pissed on his party. Clearly, things were not going as he wanted.

Suck on that, Assking.

"I assumed you would wish to join Loki in immortality," Odin said with a frown. "Before you grew much older."

Ouch.

"Yeah well, Lokes likes me for who I am, not what look like," Tony responded flippantly. "He's not as shallow as some people."

"I see," was all the king said, standing up to signal the end of their meeting. "I hope to see you again in a year's time," Odin said, putting another fake smile in place. "Please take good care of my son."

"Oh I *will*," Tony promised. "I take excellent care of him every day."

Odin did not fail to miss the implications there, and looked appropriately repelled. Tony couldn't resist one more jab at the man. He had, after all, called him pathetic.

"In fact," he said, now backing away towards the door. "I think my *treasure* needs some tender loving care right now. Thanks for having me."

Tony turned and nearly ran out the door, ignoring the angry hiss from the king. Once in the hall, he did run. His damned heart felt like it was going to burst, he was so pissed off. He slid around a corner, gaining speed as he found more familiar hallways.

*That asshole. That fucking eye patch-wearing asshole.
'Here, poor sniveling mortal, eat from my hand.'*

"Fuck you," Tony said out loud, rounding another corner. He skidded to a halt, nearly smashing into another person.

Tony lifted his eyes to the man in front of him, then gave a resigned sigh.

Just my luck.

"Fandral..."

"Mortal," Fandral spat.

"I have a name, you know."

"I care not," the man replied, moving closer to Tony with a sly smile.

"Yeah, I can see that. Can you move? I'm in a really bad mood and kinda' need to get somewhere."

"You and I," Fandral said, his voice lowering in threat. "Have *unfinished* business."

Tony made a confused face, tapping his chin with a finger. "You know, I thought we sorted that all out. I'm awesome, and you're scared of kid's toys," he said, stepping to the side to pass the man. "I'd say we're done."

"We have danced around this long enough. Fight me!"

"What is this?" Tony asked with a sneer. "West Side Story? How 'bout *no*?"

Tony clearly misjudged the length of Fandral's reach, since the god's fist smashed squarely into Stark's nose. He went flying once more.

I've got to remember that these guys are a lot stronger than they look.

Tony barely had time to sit up before Fandral's booted foot caught him in the side of the neck with a swift kick. Tony choked and blacked out for a moment.

His eyes only opened again when his body hit a pillar like a sack of rocks. Blinking away the darkness threatening to close in on him, Tony tried to get a visual on his enemy. A fat lot of good that did. He was without his suit, already ten times weaker than a god, and had been pissing the guy off for nearly four days. Not a winning combination.

Tony was having a lot of trouble breathing, seeing as his neck felt broken. He grunted when Fandral's knee drove up into his nose, his eyes shutting against the pain. He clenched his jaw, and tried to curl up to protect his head better.

Nothing I can do. Deal with it until the guy gets tired.

"Stop."

A shiver of an old fear swept through Tony's body. He hadn't heard that tone of voice in a long time. Not since he was thrown out a window. Tony managed to open one eye, finding it difficult to focus with all the pressure from his battered nose.

Fandral was still in front of him, his back now facing Tony. He could just make out Loki's form around Fandral's legs if he leaned to the side.

"Lokes," Tony groaned, his voice barely audible. Loki's gaze flickered away from Fandral and met Tony's, his eyes growing wide with shock. Looking up and down Tony's body, Loki's eyes grew darker and darker with rage.

"You should *not* have done that."

"You shall not attack me," Fandral said smugly. "If you do not wish to get in tro—"

Fandral broke in half. At least, that's what it looked like he did. A grotesque snapping noise came from somewhere in the middle of the god's back as he lifted into the air. His mouth hung open in a silent scream. The entire hallway was alive with magic, every metal surface crawling with sparks, every particle in the air charged with energy. Loki smiled.

"Lokes," Tony tried again, unable to get enough air. He flinched, the magic inside of him resonating with Loki's rage, and painfully spoke once more. "L-Lokes, we need to get out if here. *Now*."

Loki was still standing, staring at the floating figure in front of him. Tony had a nasty feeling that Fandral was not dead. Which might actually be worse. Tony frowned, feeling his vision beginning to blur again. He squinted and watched as the god slashed his nails across Fandral's face, muttering something quickly as he worked. The blood formed a sigil in the air in front of Fandral as the air went from charged to stale, and all of the energy in the hallway was instantly sucked away. Tony felt the dark chill of the void creep into the halls of Asgard.

"Loki..." he croaked, pushing himself up higher. "Whatever voodoo shit you're d-doing right now. *Stop.*"

"Why should I? After what he did to me?" Loki exclaimed. Then, his voice softening, "After what he has done to you."

"Because," Tony wheezed, falling forward a little. Tony continued, his blurred eyes now on the floor. "Whatever that is, feels real bad. Like death just came in."

Fandral dropped to the floor with a sickening thud. Tony tried to lift his head, but found he lacked the strength. Loki's cold hands touched his cheeks, causing him to jerk his head up in a sudden panic. Unfortunately, the god's fingers accidentally brushed against Tony's bruised neck. Tony let out a gurgled scream.

"Oh... Tony," Loki breathed, his eyes going wide.

Tony let out a weak laugh as Loki tilted his head up to inspect his swelling neck. He smiled weakly at the blurry face in front of him, already feeling the chill of Loki's magic crawling through his face.

"You still surprise me," Loki said, his hand tracing a line over the bruise, healing it quickly. "You are more perceptive than most mortals."

"I'm a genius," Tony responded with ease, his throat now finally healed. Loki rolled his eyes and Tony watched them, making note of their lighter color. "But really," he continued. "You just did something very dangerous. Did you complete it, or not?"

Loki smiled bitterly. "I did not. Fandral lives. It seems I shall not be seeing my daughter any time soon."

Tony laughed sarcastically and pushed himself up with a little help from Loki. They both looked down at the twitching heap of a god on the floor.

"Let's nab Thor and just go. Let his Odiness deal with this shit."

Loki stared down at Fandral and said, "There is one more thing I shall do. Then we must leave."

"No death calling."

"Not to worry, Anthony," Loki said with a nasty chuckle, crouching over Fandral's face and placing a hand over his mouth. "I am simply removing something unnecessary."

"If it's his tongue, I totally agree with your life's choices."

"Close. His voice."

Shrugging, Tony looked right into Fandral's panic stricken eyes as Loki removed his voice. Something in the blonde's eyes dimmed as Loki finished the spell. He decided he needed to ask Loki exactly what he did later. His lover stood, abruptly grabbing Stark's arm and sending them into Loki's room.

Both Frigga and Thor stood from where they had been waiting, and approached them nervously.

"Tony!" Thor boomed, rushing forward as clutching at Tony's once blue tunic. "Are you hurt?"

"I was," he replied, brushing Thor's hands off gently. "I'm fine now."

"We need to leave," Loki said sharply. "*Now*."

"Loki," Frigga muttered, concerned at his urgency. "What has happened?"

Loki frowned, his calm mask slipping away in front of his mother.

"Fandral. He attacked Anthony."

Frigga sighed and wrapped her arms around Loki tightly. "Do not worry about it. I shall take care of anything that remains unexplained here," she said, letting go of Loki to look at Thor. "You should hurry to the Biftost. Before anyone finds Fandral and reports it."

"Loki," Thor said, looking at his brother sadly. "Have you the strength to teleport us closer? I do not wish to run into any further trouble while we are here."

Tony frowned. "I take it you guys told Thor about Odin's little fit?"

Thor looked down at his hammer, his face hidden in shadow. "We will speak of it later," he said quietly, his voice heavy with pain. "When we are safer."

"I can take us to the Bifrost," Loki interrupted, grabbing Thor's arm roughly and pulling him closer to Tony. "I shan't be much use after that, though."

"You should have taught me more magic before we came," Tony said, wrapping one arm around Loki's waist, the other hooked through Thor's large arms.

"If I had know the trouble Fandral would have caused, I would have murdered him upon arrival and saved everyone the time."

"Loki..." Thor growled. Loki gave his brother a sharp look and said nothing, turning away once more to smile fondly at his mother.

"I shall see you again in a year's time."

"Be safe," she said, watching the air flicker with gold. She gave the group one last smile, and waved to Tony. The next second, they were gone.

"Please be safe."

Loki stumbled when they arrived on the rainbow bridge. Tony kept his arm around his lover's waist, helping the god hurry along. Thor cast a worried glance back at them, reaching the end of the bridge a few minutes before the pair managed to catch up.

The makeshift room at the end was not nearly as splendid as any of the palace rooms. Now that Tony had seen the finery of the kingdom, the Bifrost was clearly lacking.

"This isn't finished," he said, looking around the room. "Is it?"

Thor smiled, approaching the sword and turning it like a key in a lock. "You are correct, Tony," Thor replied. "This room is the final part of rebuilding the Bifrost. The original one was much more..."

Loki growled from Tony's side, "Gaudy."

Thor looked thoughtful for a moment and nodded in agreement. "It is time; come," he said, showing them where to stand. Tony felt his ears pop, and he closed his eyes as their bodies were ripped through space.

There was a hint of music, twisting its way through the rushing sound of the Bifrost. Tony only heard it for a moment before it was gone, the melody a familiar echo in his ears.

They arrived on the rooftop of the Avengers tower with a lot more grace than Loki thought possible. He was surprised as how well his brother had navigated them through the Bifrost, as his past experience had been far more dangerous. Thor had clearly grown in Loki's time away. But for all the ease of travel, something still felt off to him. There was a bitter taste in the air.

"Pop Tarts," Tony said, grinning at Thor. Loki's brother instantly lit up, tensing as if ready to run to his precious pastry.

"I'll race you to the kitchen, Point Break."

"I do not play such—" Thor laughed and took off running before Stark could even blink.

"You traitor!"

"Anthony," Loki said, grabbing Tony by the waist. "If he is going to cheat, so shall we."

They manifested together in the larger kitchen that the group shared. Loki smiled proudly at his win against his brother. Then he noticed Stark's expression. The mortal was staring off at nothing, not even moving to grab his prize. Loki frowned and let go of his waist. "Anthony?"

"Hmm?" Tony said, blinking his eyes and looking at him. Loki poked his forehead gently.

"Claim your glory before the oaf arrives."

"You're so mean to him sometimes," Tony said, clearly not that bothered by it.

"TONY!?"

Loki flinched, recognizing the shrill tone of the woman he still loathed. Pepper ran forward and shoved the god out of the way. Loki was about to snap at her when the woman abruptly slapped Tony across the face.

"Whuh?" Tony grunted, holding his cheek and staring at her in sheer disbelief. "What the fuck was that for?! What a nice welcome back."

"What was that for?!" Pepper shouted. "You leave for a week without telling anyone, and you don't expect us to be worried?"

"Didn't tell you? What do... You..." Tony looked from her to Loki, his eyes going wide. Before Loki could speak, Thor burst into the room, cheerily announcing his victory. Loki's eyes narrowed, and Thor faltered at the sight of the group in front of him.

"Oh, I see I have not won."

"Thor," Tony said, speaking slowly and carefully. "Did you tell anyone we were leaving for Asgard?"

Thor blinked in confusion for a moment before his eyes also widened. He glanced at his brother in fear.

"I am not the one you should be worried about, my dear brother," Loki said with a snicker.

Thor looked at Pepper, his eyes filled with guilt. "My lady, you have my most humble apologies. I was so lost in my excitement of the journey, I forgot to speak to someone before we left."

Pepper crossed her arms with a sigh. "If it's an accident, it's fine," she said, turning to give Tony a look. "But *you* at least should have remembered. What were you thinking, Tony?"

Loki felt another uncomfortable twinge in his chest. The air wavered, again smelling of something terrible yet familiar.

What is that?

It is not sulfur, it has a more metallic taste to it.

Copper?

Loki frowned, realizing he had not heard Tony's response. Thor made a startled sound, causing Loki to jerk his head up.

Stark was standing in the same place, only his face was all wrong.

It was as though half his face had gone limp. One eye seemed glazed over, and his lips on that side turned down in a frown. The other half was alive, the eye wide and sharp, one half of his lips lifted in a smirk.

"Welcome Back."

"Welcome Back."

The voices mixed, both Tony's and the creature's coming from the same mouth. The dull, brown eye suddenly widened, forcing itself up to meet Loki's while the other rolled in amusement.

It is Stark. He's still in there.

"Oh, how he struggles," said the other voice, the sharper eye flashing with a mix of annoyance and pleasure. **"He is stronger than he looks. See how little I was able to possess of him?"**

Loki tried not to flinch back from the horror that wore his lover's face. He opened his mouth but found no words could come out.

"Lokes."

"Lokes."

Tony suddenly shuddered, his face freezing between a smirk and a look of terror. The tower shook with a small tremor, sending Pepper stumbling away from Tony. A sudden flash of blue light exploded from Tony's chest. Thor grabbed Pepper seconds before the light reached her, twisting their bodies out of the way of the beam. Loki put up a shield, forcing himself to squint into the light to look at Tony.

The light faded, and a quiet voice began to sing. Loki removed the barrier and moved closer to Stark, watching his face carefully. His lover was still standing, but now looking up at the ceiling while he sang. His face had mostly returned to normal, no longer split between the creature and Tony.

"Tony?" Loki asked carefully, reaching out to touch his shoulder gently. Tony continued to sing, his eyes dark and unfocused.

"Tony," Loki said sharper, tilting the mortal's chin up to look him in the eye. Tony's song stuttered to a stop, his eyes clearing slightly.

"Oh," Tony said quietly. "Loki, looks like we're home."

Two faced Friends

Chapter Summary

" This is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Chapter Notes

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

The words in "Italics" are a conversation intended to be heard between the 'mind link'.

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Tony was feeling pretty good, regardless that no one in the tower could even look at him. Oh, and his boyfriend had avoided him for the past few days. Tony felt strong and damn impressed with himself for blasting that slimy bastard out of his body. So yeah, there were some side effects. Like his heart rate being extremely low for a while. Or the condition of his face. Half of his face was still numb, but more annoyingly, Tony couldn't see out of his left eye anymore. It was driving him nuts. Loki, of course, had tried to heal his eye immediately. Unfortunately, it turned out that it was something that would heal in time, not with magic. Since then, Loki stayed far away from him. Every night, Tony ended up sleeping alone. The god had spoken perhaps five words to him since they came back. Enough was enough.

Tony walked into the penthouse living room, carrying a bag of donuts as a peace offering. He smiled fondly when he spotted Loki seated on the floor by a window. "I come bearing gifts. So talk to me already," he said, shaking the bag at his lover.

"What do you want?"

Tony forced his smile to stay in place, even as it threatened to slip away and show his inner turmoil. Being avoided by everyone was one thing, but he needed Loki. Loki was the only one he couldn't stand losing like this.

"I want to see you," Tony responded quietly, plopping down across from Loki, trying to catch his eye. "We haven't even slept together since we got back. Is my face that hideous?"

Loki flinched and glanced at Tony. "It is not your face that bothers me."

"Really? Because it seems to be bothering everyone else."

"They have good reason to feel uncomfortable, Anthony."

"Yeah, sure. Because I'm so comfortable being treated like I have the plague," Tony snarled in response, turning to look out the window. He gave up on smiling. "Did I miss something? 'Cuz I'm pretty sure I won that fight."

Loki sighed and tucked his legs up against his chest. "It should not have happened at all."

"No *shit*. But it did."

"As always," Loki grumbled. "You miss the point."

Tony turned his head to look at Loki with his good eye. He felt a new kind of understanding for his eye-patch wearing friends. Having one eye made you inherently cranky. He shifted and tried to focus on the god in front of him.

"Tell me the point then, instead of fucking avoiding me. I have feelings too, you know."

Loki tore his gaze from the window, surprised. His eyes fell immediately on Tony's blind eye.

"I am sorry. I did not mean to hurt you."

Tony hummed, not agreeing or disagreeing. A frown formed on Loki's face as he continued to gaze into Tony's bad eye. "I am upset because my magic failed to keep you safe. He should not have been able to reach you in this tower."

"Yeah, *about* that," Tony began, running a hand through his hair. Loki narrowed his eyes. "I think he might have gotten to me in the Bifrost."

"What makes you think that? Those channels should be safe from him."

"Looks like this one isn't." Tony closed his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose. It was exhausting, using only one eye. He couldn't smile properly either, which was probably just as creepy to the others as the whole possession thing. No wonder no one could look at him. He continued, trying to keep his irritation in check, "I heard that... song while we traveled."

"The song you were singing after our return?"

Tony nodded and hummed a small part of it. What ever it was, it didn't leave his brain even after the bastard left his body. He mumbled the strange words to himself.

"He used to sing that to me," Loki said, sounding nauseated. "Back in the void."

"Do you know what it means?"

"No... I could never remember the words after he sang it."

Tony frowned, feeling uncomfortable again with the lack of solid information they had. He eyed Loki a little longer, then returned his gaze to the city below them. He didn't know how he felt anymore, about the rebuilding of New York. Sometimes he felt like they were just covering it up; pretending it never happened. Out of sight, out of mind.

"Lokes," Tony muttered. "Stop avoiding me. That feels worse than losing an eye."

Loki launched himself from his spot, crawling over to nestle into Stark's body. It was the first time they had touched in several days. Tony would not admit how much it bothered him that he had to *ask* for Loki's attention. He wrapped an arm around the god's waist and kissed the top of Loki's head. "I don't think you know how much I need you, you bastard," he said, resting his chin on Loki's head.

The god snorted and nuzzled his face into Tony's chest. "It was difficult for me as well. I ached to be near you again."

"Says the guy who didn't come near me this entire time. Why didn't you just do it?"

Loki tensed slightly. "I was afraid," he said quietly. "I failed you again and again. First I could not keep you safe from Fandral, then I failed to notice the creature's song in the Bifrost, and lastly, I could not heal you."

"Oh shut up," Tony snapped, tilting Loki's head up to glare at him. "You're not my protector. Shit happens." He squished the god's cheeks a little. "You're my boyfriend, not my body guard."

Loki jerked his face out of Tony's grip, a faint smile on his lips. "I still wish to keep you safe. No matter if you are my lover or not."

Tony laughed, giving Loki a gentle squeeze. "Well thanks, but you do. All the time," he said, bumping his nose against Loki's. "So let it go and kiss me already."

"You only want me for my kisses," Loki replied with a smirk.

"How did you know? Have you been reading my diary again?"

"I do not need to read your diary to know your desires, Anthony."

"Psh, you have no idea what I want right now."

"A kiss, was it not?" Loki asked, nuzzling their noses together. Tony tried to grin, only managing half of one. It fell from his face quickly, as he tried not to think about how horrible it looked. He had made faces at himself in the mirror as soon as he got the chance. It wasn't pretty. "Yeah, duh, I want that," he agreed, trying to keep his tone light. "But I think I deserve praise for not dying this time."

Loki shifted back, giving Tony a bored look. He flicked a hand at him, saying dryly, "Praise; adoration."

Tony snorted and pulled the god into a rough kiss. It was difficult with the numbness, but Tony had missed it badly and his body responded instantly to Loki's touch. "Lokes," he muttered against Loki's lips. "I have a confession."

Loki pulled from the kiss, looking at Tony with concern.

"Well, I bought myself something," Tony said with a small smile. "Close your eyes."

"I hate surprises, Anthony."

"Relax, just close your eyes."

Loki growled and did as he was asked. Chuckling, Tony slipped his arm away from Loki's body to reach into the donut bag. The god let out an irritable grunt, only to smile again when Tony swore at the powdered sugar on his hands.

"How does this shit stick to everything?"

Loki shrugged, his eyes still closed.

"Okay, wait. No." Tony grumbled and sneezed. "Okay, open 'em."

Loki was silent a long time after opening his eyes. He looked contemplative for a while before shifting to an annoyed look.

"I must ask," Loki said as he crossed his arms. "Why?"

"Why not? Besides, maybe the rest of my so-called friends will look at me now," Tony responded cheerily. "I even got a coat. You have to admit, it's good."

"Actually," Loki agreed. "It is rather amusing. I wish the man himself could see it."

"Nah, he's no fun anymore." Tony grunted as he jumped up, offering a hand to the god. "Come on, let's go see if those asshats even notice."

"I feel I should do something as well," Loki said with a smile, standing up and dusting off some powdered sugar from Stark's shirt. "Seeing as I owe you some attention."

"Want one too?"

Loki glared for a moment before resigning himself to his fate. This was the life he chose, living with a childish brat. "I suppose. I have a jacket if my own, after all."

"Kudos if you go full Fury," Tony said, wriggling his eyebrows at his lover.

Loki sneered. "Never go full Fury."

Several minutes later, the elevator door opened and Tony strode out with confidence. He walked right in front of Clint and Thor on the couch, standing between them and the TV. Clint jumped a little.

"What the fuck, Tony!?"

A second later, Director Fury walked in and stood next to Stark, crossing his arms and glaring down at the two on the couch. Both were wearing black leather eye-patches and leather long coats. Loki had, indeed, gone full Fury.

"Brother..." Thor began, his face a mask of horror. "You must be mad."

Tony copied Loki's crossed arms and glared at them both. "What, you jerks got a problem?"

"If Thor didn't recognize him," Clint said, looking a bit disgusted. "I probably would have just peed

myself."

"Good, now that the invisible man has your attention," Tony gave them both a one-eyed glare. "Thor, we need to talk about some things."

Both men looked equally guilty, casting glances at Loki/Fury. Thor stood and bowed his head, fidgeting. "My apologies, Tony. I shall speak with you."

Tony looked him up and down, looking unimpressed. "Fine," he said sharply. "Let's leave the piss-pot to his movie."

"Hey!?" Clint grunted. "Let me say sorry too before you run off to share your Asgardian secrets."

Fury stepped forward slightly and Clint backed down into the couch cushions. He grumbled at the fake Fury, "You have no idea how much more terrifying you make him."

Loki laughed and turned to give Stark a smirk. "See? Did I not say?"

"Yeah yeah, never go full yadda yadda," Tony agreed with a wave of his hand. "Let's go, Point Break."

Thor joined them, leaving Clint behind to mutter something about "A house full of brats." Once in the hall, Thor glanced between them nervously.

"Will you..." he began, pausing when they both looked at him. "Will you please take off the eye patches, at least. It is rather disturbing."

Fake Fury looked at Tony and shrugged, a shimmer of gold crossing his body as he changed fback rom the Director's form into his own.

"And you?" Thor asked Tony wearily.

"Nope. You're stuck with me. I can't stand you guys avoiding me anymore," Tony said, jabbing a finger at Thor's chest. "If this is what it takes to get your attention, so be it."

"It is rather childish."

"Yeah, you *are*," Tony snapped back and sauntered down the hall ahead of them. Both gods watched him go, their shoulders sagging with defeat.

Thor spoke at last, "I deserved that."

Loki patted his brother's large shoulder. "We both did."

Loki came into the room and tried to ignore the prang of fear in his gut. He found it hard to look at Stark, still wondering if it would be truly his lover looking back out of those brown eyes.

It is Tony. I saw him send the creature running.

A smaller nastier voice snuck up in Loki's thoughts.

Yes, but to where?

Tony threw the leather jacket on a chair, but kept the black eyepatch on. He looked angry and tense. Loki understood why Stark was feeling hurt, but he couldn't place the anger.

"Sit down," directed Tony, pointing to the couch. The brothers obeyed silently. They had moved up to the penthouse for privacy, as they had decided to disclose only parts of their recent trip to the other Avengers.

"Since we were all playing the 'let's avoid the *monster*' game," Tony said, giving Loki a nasty look. "I haven't had the chance to share what your dear old dad said to me."

"Anthony, you are not a—" Loki began. Stark immediately interrupted.

"We aren't talking about this."

Loki frowned and nodded, crossing his arms in mild irritation.

*If anyone else spoke to me like this,
they would be swimming in a pit of snakes.
I keep letting him do this.*

Tony seemed to not care for the god's irritation, as his own anger expanded. "It's funny, how much your family is very much alike," he said, this time looking at Thor. "Considering at least one of you is adopted."

Thor's face darkened at the comment, his body tensing in barely controlled anger. Tony sighed and ran his hand through his hair. Loki nearly smiled at the familiar gesture. Perhaps, he thought, Tony had already forgiven them.

"Anyway," Stark continued. "Thor, I'll start with you. Your lovely lady should be fine if she does the trial. It's a mental test that she takes while asleep, and it sounds generally harmless. It seems like Odin-Daddy actually wants you home and settled in or something."

"Same goes for you," Tony said, looking at Loki. He got an raised eyebrow in response. Tony chuckled bitterly and continued, "You heard him. He wants you there to be his 'diplomat'. He wants you there so badly he's offering me up immortality on a silver platter." He paused. "No, make that gold."

Loki's jaw tensed. "He offered your immortality?"

"He told me to take the test, and it was all mine. It almost sounded like he wanted me to do it right then and there."

"And you said no!?" Loki shouted, his anger rising once more. Tony's eyes grew sharp. The room suddenly felt smaller, and the usually short Stark loomed over them.

"I will *not* be the banana in the monkey trap. I'm not a fucking tool, and neither are you," Tony spoke slowly as he approached the couch. "There are a three major things I dislike. One, I don't

like things being handed to me."

Loki almost smiled at this, never once having heard Tony complain when he handed him anything. Tony continued, ticking off items on his fingers, "Two, being told what to do. And three, being told what to do by god damn *fathers*."

"So you would rather spite Odin than spend eternity with me?"

Tony's glare sharpened further, and the room's air become charged. Loki flinched back slightly, alarmed at the amount of anger in Stark.

"Have you listened to a single fucking word that I've said?" Tony growled. "I. Don't. Want. You. To. Be. Used. I won't be the one who traps you on Asgard, you dumb ass."

Thor stood up abruptly, jerking Stark away to face him instead of Loki. Thor towered over him, but apparently Tony was not to be intimidated. "You are making assumptions, Tony. Both about my father, and Loki," Thor said, his hand still firmly on Tony's shoulder. "Do not say something you will regret."

Thor stumbled backwards a second too late. A violent flash of blue light burnt the god's hand before he could remove it from Tony's shoulder. "*REGRET?!!*" Tony raged, his eye now ablaze with blue light. "You want to talk about regret? How about showing a little yourself, oh-mighty-warrior?"

Loki jumped up, maneuvering himself between the two. He reached out to calm Stark, only to jerk his hand back at another burst of magic from the man. Tony continued, his one eye never leaving Thor. "How about you feel a little remorse for the shit you put Loki through? Did you really think this was the first time your 'friends' acted like this towards him? Did you really think this was the only time your dear old dad was horrible to him? How about you stop walking around with your head up your ass for two seconds, and then we can talk about fucking regret."

Thor attempted to push past Loki, his mouth opening to respond angrily. Tony growled and stepped forward. "I'm not *done*," he said quietly. "You know what they call people like you here on Earth? An enabler. You saw what was happening, and you let it happen. I can't say I haven't done the same thing, I wasn't called the 'Merchant of Death' for no reason." Tony sneered. "But *you*, Thor, have got a thousand more years to make up for." Tony stepped closer one more time, forcing Loki to be pressed between them.

"You wanna know who I blame for the destruction of New York?" Tony asked, his eye still alight with blue sparks.

Thor's anger drained from him, a heavy dread filling his heart. His eyes met Stark's blazing anger with fear. "Who?"

"You."

"Anthony..."

Tony's glare turned in full force to Loki, not softening once their eyes met. They stared at one another until Tony frowned and turned away. "I'll leave you two to bond. I'm off to be invisible in my lab for a bit. If you need me, don't call me."

"Tony," Loki started again. But Tony ignored him and continued on out the door. The magic in the air disintegrated immediately, leaving both gods a little off balance. Loki wanted nothing more than to run after his lover and make things right. He felt like apologizing profusely, even though that wasn't something he did with ease. He doubted his apology alone was enough to fix the hurt and anger his lover was feeling right now.

"Loki," Thor said quietly. "Is what he said true? Has it really been years of such treatment?"

"Yes," Loki answered without pause, turning to look at his brother. He didn't care anymore. He couldn't hide the painful memories that rose in his mind. He let himself feel it, for the first time in a long while. "Thor, you were there. You saw how Odin treated me, how he treated my children. What of your friends? Were you truly so blind?"

"I..." Thor stopped and looked down at his hands. He had been clenching them in rage, their skin red from pressure. Opening and closing them, he spoke more quietly. "Perhaps I have been blind. I did not see things for what they truly were. If I had," he said, jerking his head up. "I would have stopped it, brother. You know I would."

Loki smiled bitterly. "And go against your own father? I think not."

"I *would*."

Loki scoffed and turned away, pushing down a small spark of hope. "You would not. He is not only your father, but the king. I cannot even imagine what foolish plan you would have concocted to solve this."

"I would have come to you for a plan," Thor said, chuckling. "You always were the one for such things."

Loki laughed quietly, and raised an eyebrow at Thor's sudden sad expression. "What is the matter now?"

"Your laughter. Tony was correct about many things that I had failed to notice," he said solemnly. "I have not seen you laugh so much, nor so honestly, since we were children. Now I see why that is."

"I had little reason to laugh on Asgard. Here," Loki said with a faint smile. "I have found a home for myself. A place where I am welcome to exist and be happy. A realm that has not lived in fear of the Jotun, or hunted them for sport. My worth is not judged unfairly due to my lineage, nor for my chosen skill sets. Thor, just as you have grown to love Midgard...no, Earth," Loki smiled wider as Thor started to brighten up. "I too have grown fond of this place."

"Brother," Thor began, pulling Loki into a tight hug. "I could never wish for anything better for you." He pulled away and smiled sadly down at his little brother. "If you wish to never return to Asgard, I understand. From what you and mother told me of his words, I find it hard not to see the dark side of the kingdom. I will never be able to look my father in the eye, and not doubt everything."

"You should always doubt, brother," Loki responded, strengthening out his now rumpled shirt. "A good king always looks for a second answer."

"Then you would make a good king."

Loki's head snapped up from his clothing inspection. Thor's previous words flashed through his mind. "I thought a throne would suit me *poorly*?"

"Perhaps only Asgard's throne. Simply because of its history," Thor said quietly. "You could never be happy, ruling such a ruined place. It would be a lot of work, righting the wrongs of many, many kings before you."

"Am I to believe you can do this?"

"Not alone, no. I would need you."

Loki went silent, his eyes searching Thor's face for that possible second answer. He furrowed his brow. "I cannot believe we are actually *bonding*. I should go find Anthony, before he blows something up."

"Do you think..." Thor frowned, trying to find his words. "Do you think he will forgive me?"

"Of course. He forgave me for killing Agent Coulson after only a few days in a cave together."

Thor snorted and laughed. "That, admittedly, was surprising. He did know him better than anyone else."

"He understood something about me, even then," Loki said, a faint blush rising to his cheeks. "It's as though he already knew what had happened to me."

Thor looked thoughtful for a moment. "Tony might have understood, seeing as his past is somewhat similar."

Loki frowned. Stark had still not spoken much of his past other than his short stint as an arms dealer. Tony's comments on his father were always short and bitter, whereas his love for his mother was evident.

Are we truly that alike?

"I would not know," Loki said quietly. "Do not tell me; I shall wait until he is ready to speak to me himself."

"I understand."

Loki smiled at his brother in relief, turning to leave. "I will see you at dinner. I'm going to try to find him."

"Be careful, Loki," Thor said, a hint of worry in his voice. "His magic should not be lashing out like that. He could have seriously harmed a lesser man than yourself or I."

"I know. I never did teach him about magic and his core. I blame myself for this."

"Perhaps now is a good time," Thor said, stretching and yawning. "He is clearly much stronger than we realize, to have sent the beast running."

"He truly is," Loki agreed and left.

Only seconds later, Steve came running down the hall towards Loki.

"We need to turn around and find somewhere safe for you to go."

Loki narrowed his eyes and stopped the man from pulling him back the way he came.

"Why? What is wrong?"

"Long story short," panted Steve. "Stark got mad at Bruce and threw something at him."

"Anthony got angry with Bruce? That..." Loki frowned.

"Is usually impossible? Yeah, well it sounded like Bruce was avoiding him," Steve said, and looked at Loki sadly. "Just like the rest of us. Stark seemed to have had enough, and had a fit. He ran off afterwards, and according to Jarvis, is flying around the city yelling at things."

Loki twitched. It was a small twitch, but it was noticeable.

"He is *outside* of the house?!"

"That's not our biggest problem right now."

Steve looked down the hall and back to god with urgency. He seemed to be waiting for something to arrive.

“RRRRRRHHHGGAAARRRGHH?!”

Oh.

"That would be the green beast, then?"

"No. Uh, yes." Steve said, casting another glance behind him. "Apparently Bruce was *really* surprised at having something chucked at his head."

"Apparently," Loki said, his voice sour. Large, shaking footsteps came closer down the hall.

"We really need to get you out of sight, Loki. You still register as an enemy with him. Can you change your form?"

"Somehow I doubt the beast relies on visual recognition alone."

"Loki! You need to—"

"No time," Loki said with a weak smile, just as Hulk turned the corner. The larger man could barely fit in the hall way standing. So he crouched down and rushed towards them.

"Hulk! W-wait!" Steve yelled, starting to move in front of Loki. Hulk slid to a stop, but barely.

"I believe I can take over now," Loki said, gently pushing Rogers to his side. He looked up and found the small, angry eyes in front of him. "Hulk, I am not a *threat*," he said carefully. "I care for everyone in this tower, and that includes you. I am no longer a danger. You can smell me all over the tower. I have been here for a year or so."

Hulk looked annoyed that he was being forced to listen, not smash. But listen he did.

"You, not so angry," he said, shifting back a little to eye the god.

"I am not. You are correct," Loki said calmly. "Actually, I am glad to be able to personally thank you."

Hulk blinked. "Me?"

"Yes, now that we meet again face to face. It was you who helped me get better." Loki chuckled at the perplexed look on Hulk's face. "So you have my thanks."

"Hulk helped?"

"Yes you did," Steve joined in, standing next to Loki and patting his back. Loki did his best not to shrug the soldier off. Visual confirmation of friendship was just as important as their words. Hulk's face broke out in a silly grin.

"Now, I would suggest you head down to the training room," Loki directed, still smiling. "I am sure Stark would appreciate less damage to his home. There you can be a little more rough while you enjoy your short stint in the world again."

Hulk, still grinning, immediately turned around and ran down the hallway to find his way down to the basement.

"It's official," Steve said, his hand finally releasing its nervous grip on Loki's shoulder. "You're the Hulk Handler."

"No more pet names," Loki said, rolling his eyes. "I do believe Anthony is rubbing off on you."

"I could say the same," Steve said with a weak smile. He meant it innocently, but Loki could not help but smile at the quite literal thoughts that followed his words. Stark really was a bad influence on him.

"I agree, he *has*," Loki paused and looked down the hall for any signs of Hulk retuning. "Speaking of, I must go find him."

"Can you just," Steve asked, mimicking a magic gesture with gusto. "Sense him?"

"I can—although, not with so much flailing about."

"Oh," Steve replied, looking thoroughly embarrassed. Loki gave the captain one more smile and left to find his brother.

“Loki,” Thor said, surprised at his brother's return. “Were you not going to speak to Tony?”

“He went out. I may need a little assistance in bringing him back.” Loki paused, closing his eyes. He sensed him instantly, hearing snippets of angry thoughts. Tony was having some sort of internal rant about his thrusters. Loki snorted and opened his eyes. “He is fine. Just taking his anger out on his suit. I shall fetch him myself.”

“I see,” Thor said quietly. “I will leave it to you, then.”

Loki said, “I will return shortly.” Then he was gone. Thor stared at the empty room for a while, a small frown on his face. The roomed seemed to sway before his eyes, the world growing dim. He shuddered once before a nasty smile began to grow on his face. Thor straightened up and looked down once more at his still burnt hand.

“Aaahhh... now, this is an interesting vessel.”

And Then There Were None

Chapter Summary

"Five little monkeys jumping on the bed
One fell off and bumped his head
Mama called the doctor,
And the doctor said
No more monkeys jumping on the bed."

Chapter Notes

[Unedited until tomorrow. Just wanted to post.]

NOTE: The words in *Italics* that are not contained in "" [and that stand alone, not in a sentence] are the characters thoughts and not intended for others to overhear. [although it does sometimes happen.]

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Tony shouted at Loki for twenty minutes before he allowed the god to haul his ass back to the tower. They arrived instantly in their room; Tony promptly stripping off his armor and throwing himself onto the bed.

"I should let Thor know we have returned," Loki said, dropping his leather coat on the floor with the rest of Tony's laundry. Tony snickered as he looked over his shoulder. The god seemed to be catching some of his bad habits.

"Nope," Tony grumbled before he nuzzled his face into into the pillow. "Jarvis, you can let him know we're back."

"Right away, sir."

Loki let out a huff of laughter and moved closer.

"Have you been sleeping?" He inquired tentatively, sitting on the edge of the bed and rubbing Tony's back.

"Yes..."

Loki lay down next to him, leaving a protective arm across Stark's back. "Anything less than a hour does not count, love."

"Then, no," Tony said, sighing into his pillow. "I think I dozed off for an hour yesterday down in the lab. You probably heard the fire alarm."

"So that is what that was?"

"Don't ask."

Loki chuckled and scooted closer. "Let us sleep, then," he said as he nuzzled his face into Tony's arm. Tony nodded, already starting to doze off. Smiling to himself, he thought about how much his life had changed since falling through the portal.

Before, he always had trouble falling asleep. Even when he went to bed with Pepper, he found that he just could not shut his brain off. Whether it was compiling notes on the day's test run, or the impending nightmares; he couldn't stop those running thoughts. With Loki, it was different. Not just because they had their own special place to hide away in. Something about him relaxed Tony like no other. He wasn't oblivious to the fact that he had no problem taking things that Loki handed him. Or the fact that Loki hated most of his music and somehow, he didn't care.

His thoughts drifted and slowed, a few stray memories drifting through his mind. The last one he remembered, before he was whisked away to Loki's dream room, was a memory of Loki ranting about AC/DC and how music should at least include melody.

"No gang signs."

"I'm kidding..." Tony said, frowning. Didn't he do this before?

He turned to look at the soldier beside him. Instead of the young man's face that had long since been etched into his memory, it was Steve. "What the fuck? Steve, we need to save these people."

Steve ignored him and looked out the window with a dark expression on his face. Tony hissed in irritation, launching himself over to look into the front seat. Clint was driving and Natasha was curled up on the other side looking sick.

This isn't right. This didn't happen.

"Hey, Romanoff," he asked, leaning over to see her better. "You don't look so good."

The spy groaned and turned her head to look at him, allowing Tony to see the bleeding head wound. He grunted in surprise.

This is all wrong.

When Tony leaned back, it was Thor sitting beside him. He was staring out the same window, dark rings under his eyes and a shallow cheeked. He had never seen the god look so awful. Thor looked as lost as Loki seemed when they first started talking in the cave.

The cave.

Tony continued to peer at Thor as if the god could explain everything.

What was important about the cave?

The first explosion sent Tony through the windshield. He hit the ground hard and the army Jeep tilted over, nearly crushing him under a flaming chunk of metal. Everything was different than the last thousand times he went through this. For once, Tony didn't know what to expect.

Where is Loki? Loki is always here when we dream together.

Tony tried to talk, scream, move. He couldn't, something heavy was on his chest. He coughed the desert dirt out of his lungs and sat up. It was dark, the only light coming from a few stray bulbs hanging from the cave ceiling.

Oh. I haven't been back in the cave for a long time.

Tony clutched the car battery to his chest and slid off the bunk. He wobbled around, trying to gain his balance back when his attention was caught by a lump on the floor by the open doorway..

*No. This is not happening. I refuse to see this.
Dead eyes and the smell. Where are his glasses?*

It's too much.

Tony screamed in anger and horror and jerked awake. He sat there, panting and shaking uncontrollably while he tried to catch his breath.

"I'm sorry."

Tony turned with a frown to look down at Loki. "I'm the one who should be sorry. I woke you up."

"I'm sorry for leaving you to sleep alone these past few nights," Loki responded quietly, his eyes shining in the light of Tony's reactor. Squinting with his one good eye, Tony could just make out Loki's saddened expression.

"Hey, I get it," Tony said, reaching over and nudging the god. "You were scared."

"I do *not* get scared."

"Yeah, you *do*."

There was a lengthy pause before Loki spoke again. "Only for you. Not of you."

Tony smiled and patted Loki's hip. "Go back to sleep, you're being poetic again."
Loki grunted and the small pricks of light went out as he closed his eyes.

Caves, Tony thought to himself, fidgeting with a corner of the sheet.

Why do the key moments in my life take place in caves. If I wasn't an Atheist, I would almost say someone planned it that way.

Tony frowned and went completely still, his mind stringing thoughts together one by one. It was almost as if someone wanted to use the cave as a catalyst. Something Tony would feel a certain attachment to. Almost as if someone wanted...

Us to get together.

*Did we do, exactly what someone or something
wanted us to do?*

Loki lets out a soft sigh and snuggled into where Tony's body usually was. Tony couldn't hold back a smile at the fact that a god of lies and chaos managed to look so utterly cute.

I'll think about it when I'm less tired and paranoid. No reason to freak Loki out.

Laying back down, Tony snuck his way into his lovers arms and fell, at last, into a calm sleep.

Thunder woke them. It wasn't unusual during this past year for Thor to cause some weather changes. What was unusual was how particularly violent the storm was.

"Fucking hell," Tony swore as he looked out the window closest to the bed. "What crawled up your brother's golden ass this morning?"

Loki rolled over and peered at the rain-sheeted widows. "Undoubtably my lack of attention to him after our return," he replied and frowned as another snap of lightning struck a near by building. "Something feels off about this storm, though."

"You feel that too?" Tony asked, sitting up and running a hand through his hair. "It screams 'rejection' all right. But it's something... else."

Loki tilted his head at him. "Remind me to give you a lesson in honing your magic skills today. You are far too perceptive and powerful to go on without proper schooling."

"Powerful?" Tony asked with a snort. "I don't think so, sweet cheeks. At best, I'm a toaster. You're like a Mark 15."

"I do not understand what that means."

"Of course not, you—"

Thunder rolled loudly, ending their conversation for them. Tony grumbled and climbed out of bed, searching through a few drawers for some clothes.

"Something is really wrong," Loki thought to Tony.

"What makes you say that?"

"Thor was not even this emotional when I was hurt," Loki responded, a glitter of gold appearing around him to provide him clothing. *"This is something worse. To him, something worse than me in pain, is something to be feared."*

Tony turned and gave Loki a look, keeping his blind eye closed. *"Why does this sound like the*

opening to a horror film?"

All he got in response was a glare before Loki disappeared from the room.

Someone screamed from downstairs.

"Shit, that did not sound like a B movie scream." Tony tugged on some pants and bolted from the room. He hit the stairs going way too fast and ended up rolling his way down the last few steps. Limping a little, he peeked through the door into the short hall that lead to the common room. With no one in sight, Tony decided it was safe enough to creep closer to look around the corner.

Thor was standing in the middle of the room, wearing a strange combination of his armor and human clothing. If not for the fact that there was blood dripping from said armor, Tony wouldn't have been all that surprised at the god's sloppiness.

"Brother," Loki said from somewhere out of sight. "Please tell me that is not you."

Tony raised an eyebrow and peered further around the corner to find his boyfriend. He spotted him on the far end of the room in front of the other hallway. Behind him, Natasha was holding her head and leaning against the wall shakily.

An image from his dream flashed through his mind. Bloodied Red head in the front seat.

"Why, Lokes," Thor said cheerfully. **"You should not doubt me."**

"You," Loki spat, reaching behind him and urging Natasha to go down the hall way. She glanced between the two gods before she noticed Tony. Natasha stared at him meaningfully for a minute before she bolted away.

Tony thought to Loki, *"Hey, since I can't do the Mind Link to anyone else, now is a good time for you to talk to them about what's going on."*

Loki frowned, keeping his eyes on Thor as he started to creep sideways in an attempt to keep Thor's attention on him only.

"When did you arrive, Anthony?"

"I just rolled my way down after the scream."

Loki grimaced as he moved behind the couch.

"I will contact Clint and Bruce first. Perhaps they have something that can put him to sleep."

"Good idea," Tony agreed, crouching down a little to keep the weight off of his ankle.

"Stop your foolish game, Lokes," Thor growled, his voice less playful.

"I am not the one playing games here," Loki responded shortly, launching himself over the couch to land a heavy blow between Thor's eyes with an elbow. The blond was sent flying backwards into the wall that Tony was currently hiding behind. All of the framed pictures in the hall fell and shattered around Tony.

Great. I should have grabbed some shoes. Or maybe my god damn suit.

Tony glanced around the corner again and caught Loki's eye.

"I need my bracelets. Think you can distract him long enough for me to grab them from the kitchen?"

"That is not a good idea..." Loki skirted backwards as a fist came at his face suddenly. The gods began exchanging blows faster than Tony could follow. With both of them distracted, Tony dove behind the couch and rolled his way into the kitchen. Once there, he leaned back against the cabinets to catch his breath.

"Wow."

"Jesus fuck!?" Tony jumped, ready to lash out.

Clint glanced at him apologetically.
"Sorry."

Tony flipped him off and joined him in looking over the top of the counter. Clint sighed. "He wasn't just bragging when he said we should see them train together," he said, whistling. "Impressive."

"Yeah well, somehow I doubt Thor would be this vigorous if it were actually Thor."

"It's that thing again," Steve joined in from the other side of Clint. "Isn't it?"

"Seriously?" Tony snapped. "Who else is back here? You got Hulk in the fridge?"

"Just us," Clint responded, sounding worried. "Well, Nat was with us until Thor exploded. Then we got separated."

"She's alright. Loki sent her to get Bruce."

"Yeah," Steve said, shifting to look around the side. "He said something in our heads about it."

Tony spotted his bracelets, and gritted his teeth. He frowned down at them as he slipped them on. "Glad that worked. Now, if you guys would excuse me, I've got a tall, dark, and handsome princess to save."

"I'm telling him you said that."

Tony gave him a look, then summoned his suit. Flipping the face plate down, Tony responded with a smirk, "I dare you."

Loki had what looked like a clump of Thor's hair in his hand. Thor's hands were now frozen to the floor in a block of ice. Tony vaguely wondered if his boyfriend had gone Smurf to do that.

"Hey," he asked, coming out of the kitchen. "Need some help?"

"Stand back, Tony!" Loki shouted. "The last thing we need right now is for you to be possessed while wearing... that."

"Oh, Tony. Why don't you come join us?" Thor asked, tearing his hands from the floor and shattering the ice. **"I rather liked being in you. All that affection for our Lokes here. It is almost on par with my own."**

With a short burst from his thrusters, Tony shot up in the air and dropped Thor to the ground with an elbow to the neck.

"You say that again," Tony snarled. "And I don't care what body you're in, you're going to suffer."

"What you fail to understand," Thor said with a bloody grin. **"Is that I am all Loki truly has. You have barely scratched the surface, boy."**

Thor laughed and the room shook. **"Where are all his friends? Hiding away and letting him fight alone?"** He asked, his mad eyes rolling towards the kitchen.

"Nope," Clint disagreed, aiming an arrow at Thor's face from the other side of the couch. "We're right here."

A hint of a smile formed on Loki's face. "I believe," he said proudly. "I have an army."

"No, I'm afraid I do."

Tony jumped back just in time to avoid a wisp of a shadow slip from Thor's lips and rise into the air. Thor coughed and gurgled, his eyes fluttering open and looking around. Loki was by his side immediately, placing his hands on Thor's chest to heal him.

"You keep doing that," Tony instructed, standing up while keeping an eye on the shadow. "We're gonna deal with this guy."

Loki shook his head. "Tony..."

The smokey shadow paused above their heads before shooting across the room and smashing into Clint. Steve shouted something and rushed to help him. Luckily, Tony snatched the soldier away seconds before an arrow flew into Steve's head.

Clint's laugh sent shivers down Tony's spine. **"This one has a weak mind,"** he said with a nasty grin. **"Oh, it looks as though you have been in here Loki."**

"Not I. Look closer," Loki growled. "You shall see who was there."

Clint went silent, his bow resting on his knees as he thought. The room groaned as if the tower itself was processing the event. The archer's eyes went wide, his confident smile gone in seconds.

"Thanos..."

Loki laughed bitterly when the shadow escaped quickly from Clint's body. "Why, are you scared of little old him?"

Steve pushed Stark away as the dark blur shot towards them. It joined with Steve and left again as quickly as it entered. Tony let out a huff of laughter as it flew away down the hall.

"Good ol' patriotism," he said sarcastically. "Nothing like America to—"

A loud grunt interrupted him, causing his smile to drop immediately.

"Oh for fucks sake," Tony grumbled, turning to face the hall. "*Please* tell me that was Natasha."

Clint managed a weak laugh from where he was still slouched on the floor. "I've never heard her make *that* sound before."

"It must be Hulk."

"Must be," Tony agreed with Steve and waved at Loki. "You, move your gold fish out of the way."

Loki wasted several seconds to glare at Stark before he dragged his brother's limp body behind the couch. Tony waited and smiled faintly when he saw Loki's dark-haired head pop back up to continue his glare over the top of the couch. His amusement was short lived due to the fact that half the wall that separated the kitchen and the hallway got thrown across the room at them.

Tony opened his eyes to the sounds of coughing and swearing from around him. What worried him was the soft whimper that seemed to be coming from his left. Tony turned his head as far as possible, squinting his right eye to see who it was.

Clint was halfway under a huge chunk of plywood and concrete. With shaking arms, the archer had somehow kept the rubble from crushing his chest.

"Hang on, buddy," Tony called out, trying to sit up himself. He had moved just in time to take the brunt of the attack and managed to catch most of the wall, but not enough apparently. He pushed up the larger slab off of him, and nearly screamed. His knee was crushed inside the casing of his suit, bleeding out of every crack in the metal

"Shit... okay, Clint," he said slowly. "I'm going to be a little slower than I thought."

"It's...fine..." Clint panted. "I could do... this all... day."

"Psh," Tony scoffed, trying to keep his voice light and carefree. "No you can't."

"Anyone else alive?!" He shouted through the cloud of dust. "Sound off!"

"Stark!"

"Who's that?" Tony grunted, pulling him self closer to Clint. The agent was growing more pale by the second.

"It's Steve," the solider replied from out of sight. "I'm with Loki and Thor. We are all fine."

"Tony," Loki called out. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine, Lokes. Just peachy."

Clint laughed weakly and shuddered under the weight just as Tony managed to slide his way under the piece of wall and prop it up on his shoulder.

"Come on, slither on out of there. My suit's power is off," Tony said, a sweat breaking out on his face. "This is all man power now."

Clint groaned and pulled his way out, pulling his legs behind him. The archer looked pained and exhausted.

"What's broken, Legolas?" Tony asked, slipping the wall off his shoulders and letting it fall. The air filled with more dust, blocking Tony's already limited view. Before Clint could respond, Tony was jerked into the air and thrown across the room.

His back cracked as he hit the breakfast bar in the kitchen. It was either that or the marble countertop shattering beneath him. Either way, it hurt like hell and completely winded him.

Loki started panicking at him in his mind, and it wasn't helping. *"Tony?! What was that? Was that you? Are you alright?"*

"Lokes, darling, please shut up a sec," he thought back.

"Well, excuse me for being concerned."

"Concern is fine, babe. The wave of freak out is a little too much for my aching skull."

Loki left him in silence while he caught his breath and sat up. He ignored the roar from somewhere back in the living room, and crawled his way over to join the others behind the couch. Steve had Thor's head in his lap. It would have been cute if they weren't both bloody and exhausted.

"Hey, where's Clint?" He asked, peering around the couch in concern. Loki pulled him close and began healing him before he responded.

"Barton made it into the hallway before the beast found him. I believe he is hiding in the stairwell with a broken foot."

"Damn," Tony said with a wince, feeling his broken knee bones attempt to heal in the small space of his suit. "Stop, *stop it* Loki!"

"What? Why are you stopping—"

"The metal around my knee is crushing it," Tony responded irritably. "You're just driving the bones and shit right into it. I have to get the suit off first."

The god apologized, jerking his hand away from Tony quickly. "I will not be able to remove it without hurting you right now," he said, turning away from Stark. "Besides, we have more pressing issues."

"Did you just make a pun about my leg?" Tony asked in disbelief. "No, never mind, you aren't that lame. More pressing matters, huh. Like a possessed Hulk?"

"The trouble lies in Bruce's mind. He was just changed only hours before hand, so all of his usual mental walls were not up in time for this sudden change."

"What the hell do you mean?"

Loki went silent and glanced at the captain.

"Loki, what do you mean his 'mental walls'?" asked Steve slowly.

"Bruce's mind is a turbulent place. He lives inside a safe bubble whilst surrounded by the rage of the beast," Loki spoke quickly and quietly, keeping his voice low for fear of alerting Hulk of their position. "It is something like a violent storm. Now, due to the possession and the fact that he has changed again far too soon..."

"He's in danger, isn't he?" Tony asked, his heart dropping.

Loki nodded and looked away. "There are cracks emitting from where the creature entered his mind. I sensed them immediately when he possessed him. If they continue to grow," Loki paused and gave Stark a solemn look. "He will be lost forever."

"Lost... how?"

"Even if we remove the darkness, the Hulk will win. The beast will take control forever, and your friend will be no more."

Something small and fragile snapped inside Tony, and with its absence came a flood of rage.

"No more shit," he growled, standing up with the help of the battered couch. His voice rose as he started to limp into the living room. "No more hurting my friends. No more lies. No more fucking mind games."

Loki hissed his name and he ignored it, all of his attention on the large, panting beast in front of him. He didn't flinch when Hulk rushed him, curling his powerful hands around Tony's armor and pulling him face to face.

With a slow smile, Tony growled, "You and me, we need to have a talk."

Light, pure blue and blinding, emitted from his chest once again. It washed over the room, causing the two behind the couch to shield their eyes. The Hulk screamed as the darkness was ripped from him, and pulled into Tony.

"NO!!" Loki shouted, leaving the others behind to stumble towards Tony.

"Lokes..."

"Lokes..."

Tony turned and fell as Hulk turned back into Bruce. They both landed heavily, but Tony managed to stay standing. His face hadn't changed, but Loki could already feel the uproar in his lover's mind.

"Tony... what have you done?" Loki asked, reaching out to him hesitantly. Tony flinched back and smiled at him sadly.

"I'm sorry," he said. Then he was gone.

"Where is he?!" Shouted Steve seconds after Tony disappeared. "How can he even do that?"

Loki remained silent, staring at nothing.

"No..."

Steve felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up. The Loki he knew never sounded scared. He always passed it off as boredom or rage. What he heard in the god's voice now was pure, unashamed terror.

"Loki, where *is* he?"

Loki continued to stare, his eyes growing wide with realization.
"It cannot be..." He said quietly, his voice becoming choked.

"Dammit, Loki! Where is he!?"

"Gone," he replied quietly, his eyes glassy and wet. "I cannot feel him at all."

Steve paled and stumbled back, falling into the dirty, broken couch.
"What does that mean? He's dead?"

Loki turned at last to look at the soldier. "No, it is much worse," he said, his voice barely audible.
"He has left this realm for another with the darkness inside him."

"He has gone where I cannot reach him."

Gone, Baby, Gone

Chapter Summary

To what lengths will the Avengers go to save not only the missing Tony, but possibly Thor's life?

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the short chapter. It really needed to be broken up for several reasons. Things will be busy back on earth for a while, so I didn't want to switch back within the same chapter.

[Unedited currently. Please forgive me.]

Thor's eyes followed several pigeons as they flew by his window in the afternoon light. It was an unusual sight for so high up in the tower, causing him to wonder if Loki had a hand in it. His brother always had a strange affinity for birds. Thor's eyes soon glazed over, his thoughts slowing into nothingness. He continued to sit on his bed, staring vacantly out the window as his eyes no longer followed the birds.

Loki had tried everything in his power to heal his brother. He traveled deep into the recesses of Thor's mind, only to find large areas of it blank. No memories, no dreams, nothing. He could feel their presence, but he could not find them. It was as if someone had plastered over them with white wallpaper. Loki wanted nothing more than to tear it down, but he couldn't without causing more damage to Thor's mind.

He tried returning to Asgard, but the Bifrost was still not attuned to him. Bruce offered his help as a doctor, and Loki brushed him off with a nasty comment. After weeks of relentless attempts at healing Thor, he finally asked for help. He had exhausted all of his resources long ago. The Bruce tried several medical concoctions of his own design, and when nothing worked, he suggested shock therapy. That almost got a laugh out of Loki. Almost.

No one had noticed how badly Thor was doing until the day he collapsed. A week after Tony's disappearance, the god had seemed frail, but functioning. He spoke as his usual self, ate with the same gusto, and laughed as jovially as ever. When he fell, Steve panicked, thinking the creature had returned to possess him again. Bruce was the first to realize that Thor was actually having a seizure. After that, nothing was the same. Thor stopped laughing, and no longer held an appetite. Whenever he tried to speak, his words slurred together or come out in the completely wrong order.

Loki tried and tried and tried. He wore himself down until he was as thin and sickly as he was under Thanos' thumb. He ignored any suggestions for him to slow down. He snapped at anyone who tried to talk to him, let alone touch him. But at the end of every day, he would go into his brother's room and tell him stories from their past. Whenever anyone passed the door, they stopped

and listen for a while. They learned more about the two gods in those first few weeks of Tony's absence than they had learned in the course of a year.

Time crawled by slowly, and soon it was fall again. Three months had passed since Tony disappeared, and little had changed for the better.

"Brother," Loki said softly, watching Thor stare out the window. "Can you at least look at me?"

Thor remained motionless, as he had all day. He had stopped responding yesterday, and his eyes failed to focus on anyone for longer than a moment. It was as though he was finally shutting down for good.

"Then, I hope you are listening." Loki paused, leaning forward and resting his face in his hands. "I cannot leave this realm without the Bifrost. I cannot find Tony without the Bifrost," Loki spoke slowly, as if speaking to a child. "I cannot use the Bifrost without you."

Loki looked up and stared at the blank face in front of him.

"Brother, I *need* you."

For the first time in many years, Thor failed to answer Loki's cry for help.

An hour later, Steve's voice broke the silence. "Loki, we need to talk," he spoke gravely from the doorway.

Loki jerked his head up, his neck cracking from the movement. Somehow, he had dozed off while he sat there watching for any minuet change in Thor's demeanor. "I do not *need* to do anything you tell me to do."

"It's just a saying..." Steve responded carefully, leaning against the door frame with a frown. "Look, you can't keep trudging on alone. No one can do everything alone."

Loki opened his mouth to argue before Rogers continued, "You seem to forget that we lost Tony too. So what you need to remember is, we will do anything to get him back. We will listen to you, and follow your orders. So stop sulking in here and figure out a way for all of us to fix this."

Loki stared at the man impassibly, considering his options.

"If... I ask for something against your morals, will you do it?" Loki asked, a small smile forming on his face.

"Depends on what it is. For the most part, yes."

Loki stood abruptly, a swirl of gold around him forming into a fresh set of leathers. He was ready for battle with a shark-like smile. "Oh, I think you might just enjoy it."

"I don't like the sound of this already."

"Fret not, captain. I believe we may be able to work something out." He stopped by the doorway, a hand on the frame to keep himself steady. Either Steve missed it, or he didn't feel the need to comment on Loki's weakened state. Loki looked back once more at his broken brother, his smile faltering slightly. "Let us gather everyone, it is far past time we did something about this."

"I knew I wasn't going to like it."

"You do not have to *like* it, Rogers," Loki responded dryly. His patience was already thin from hours of planning and far too many arguments. It was his plan, and he knew it would work. Now if everyone else would just go along with it and stop being so obtuse.

"Breaking Doctor Doom out does not sound like a good start to any plan," Clint said, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Never mind the fact that Fury hates us, Doom probably hates us more. Did anyone else forget that we were the ones to get him locked away?"

Loki scoffed, crossing his arms in irritation. "How could I forget, since I was the one who did all of the work."

Clint rolled his eyes and gestured for Loki to go on.

"Look, nothing planned flows perfectly," Loki said. "Not even for me."

Natasha snickered quietly, leaning back with a rare look of amusement on her face.

Loki ignored her and continued on, "All we must do is offer an incentive. Namely, we let him live if he continues his existence in a more... peaceful manner. He is the key to helping Thor, I know it. I am more aware of his powers than any of you."

"Uh, no offense," Bruce joined in quietly. "But we've kind of been dealing with him longer. I think we know what he's capable of. I have yet to see him manage anything within the realm of healing."

"You are all mere mortals. You cannot fathom the connection magic users have," Loki replied, keeping his tempter in check. It was growing more difficult by the second. "I could sense his power immediately, and I was not disappointed. How do you think he has done so well after his accident?"

"Can we please stop arguing about this and actually get to the whole 'we get to rescue Tony' part?" Clint asked, glaring at Bruce jokingly.

Bruce smiled at him tiredly and nodded, looking back at Loki. "So you say we get him out, then what?"

"That," Loki said with a wide smile. "Is where it becomes interesting."

Loki was aware that their plan had a specific amount of time for it to work, before everything came crashing down around them. Bruce was the only one who stayed behind at the tower, 'Thor-sitting' as Clint called it. He wasn't necessary for the more furtive part of their scheme.

The rest of them joined him in a small jet Tony had left in his private hanger on the outskirts of the city. They had used it before, but it felt different taking it without Stark's say so. As though they were robbing the dead. The craft was ingenious, small and apparently equipped with a rather advanced cloaking device. Loki smiled, allowing himself to think about Tony for the first time in

days.

Trust Stark to create something amazing like this, only to rely on his suits instead.

He always runs ahead into action.

"We're at the correct altitude," Natasha said, drawing Loki from his thoughts.

"Stay as far back as you can. You are only needed if something goes wrong." Loki stood, hunched under the jet's low ceiling. "You know how I shall contact you."

"Just make sure you contact the Captain or Barton. I don't want to be distracted while trying to fly this thing."

"Understood."

"Loki," Steve called out from his seat. "Be quick about this. We only have a small window once we get him back to the tower."

Loki nodded, giving the man a small, reassuring smile before he disappeared.

The helicarrier was as cold and lifeless as Loki remembered. There was an impressive difference between the flying machines that Stark made, and this iron bulk. Loki never realized until now how alive Tony's creations felt in comparison. Everything he made was filled with energy, as if it had a soul of its own.

Perhaps he has always had his own sort of magic.

Although, I should have detected it better when I first arrived.

It is odd that I felt nothing from him in our close quarters on Jotunheim.

Loki's breath hitched and he shook his head, returning his focus to the task at hand. He had arrived in the hallway leading to the cells, not wanting to alarm Doom as he did last time. Although he was not visible to the camera's he knew that the magic user would be able to see him. Loki reached the glass prison and peered in curiously.

At some point in the past few months, Doom had fallen apart. His angry energy had given way to something more resigned and beaten. His mangled face was lax of emotion, while his body had clearly given up on remaining healthy. Doom was skinny, mangy, and old.

"Why, Doctor, you have really let yourself go," Loki commented, passing through the glass with ease. He observed Doom's eyes light up as he sensed his presence.

"It's *you* again. Come back to make a ghost out of me again?"

"Hardly," Loki replied with a kind smile. "I wish to offer you a deal."

"I don't deal with tricksters like you. I know your true nature."

"My true nature bends to my will. My will is to get back something that is lost. Therefore, I will do whatever necessary to get what I want."

Doom sat up, his body filling with life one again. He stretched and eyed Loki with curiosity. "What did you lose, magic user?"

"That is not of your concern. I only need your assistance in healing someone's mind." Loki paused, a hint of uncertainty creeping into his voice. "Are you capable of such a thing? I presumed you were, with the tremendous power you wield."

"I can do it," Doom agreed, smirking slightly at the compliment. "What are you willing to give me in return?"

"You're freedom."

"You can't promise me that. The Avengers will never allow it, let alone Fury."

Loki chuckled, tilting his head to one side. "I am here with the Avengers. As for Fury, there are ways around the mortal. As I am sure you know."

"Part of the deal," Loki continued, stalking closer to the bunk where Doom sat. "Is that you keep your chaos to a minimum. Otherwise, my offer of freedom becomes a threat on your life."

"So, I do what you want, and you won't kill me? That sounds like a threat to me."

"Interpret it as you wish," Loki responded with a venomous grin.

"That's exactly how you meant it." Doom laughed and stood up, wrapping his thin robe around his body proudly. "When do we start?"

Things became complicated very quickly. Loki cast a glamour that mirrored Doom's form in the cell, leaving first through the glass to test his magic's bounds. He was weakened considerably after months of tirelessly using his magic to heal Thor. The fake Doom would only hold as long as Loki concentrated on it, and he was unsure of how well it would hold up at a distance. As soon as Doom disappeared from the cell, all hell would break loose again. Unlike last time, this was not the desired affect. This time, Loki needed stealth. He needed time.

The teleportation of two people broke his concentration instantly. Loki felt the spell waiver and lose power as soon as they left the carrier. Upon their arrival in the smaller craft, Natasha was already intercepting transmissions from SHIELD. They were alert and scanning the skies.

"I believe," Loki said slowly, a wave of dizziness washing over him. "It is time to leave."

"We're leaving now," Natasha replied, jerking the control to the left and sending them into a sharp turn. "How long do you think we have until Fury realizes it was actually us this time?"

Loki snorted and gave the archer a look, seeing as Natasha was busy. Clint shrugged and snapped his belt closed. Doom sat silently in his seat, trying to remain out of the way. Sighing, Loki responded tiredly, "I cannot predict his actions so easily. I can only assume he will act in the order he is expected to. An investigation first, and then he will lead a full on attack on us."

"Sounds like a fun night ahead of us," Steve said sarcastically.

The captain was acting calm, but Loki could see that his hands were trembling slightly. It was in that moment that Loki realized how much they had been suffering these past few months. He had grieved alone this entire time, not once ever noticing how worried Tony's friends were. They did everything he asked of them, even as he screamed at them to leave him be. Yet here they were, going against everything they stood for, just to get Tony back.

Loki tilted his head up, looking around at his comrades. Yes, they were his comrades now. They had come to his aid many times already, regardless of how poorly he had treated them.

"Thank you," he blurted out, startling himself.

There was a stunned silence before Clint burst out laughing. "Oh man, Tony's gonna to be *pissed*."

"Why?" Loki asked nervously.

"Because you thanked us before you ever thanked him. We took your 'thanks' virginity."

"You did no such thing!" Loki snapped, huffing in embarrassment. "I have thanked Anthony plenty of times."

"Don't be shy," Clint teased, looking over his shoulder and batting his eyelashes at the god.

Loki flicked a small orb of magic at his face, relishing the squeal of surprise and pain from the archer.

Steve smiled sadly, turning away from his controls to look back.

"He's going to be okay, Loki."

Loki frowned, knowing without anyone saying, exactly who he was talking about. "He is strong," he agreed quietly.

"He'll hang in there," Clint added confidently, rubbing his nose.

They spent the rest of the journey in silence, each lost in thought about the one person missing from their lives.

Tony was bored. It was surprisingly easy to be bored, and in immense pain at the same time.

How the fuck did I end up here again?

Tony wondered bitterly if it was Loki's fault or his own. He sighed and tried one more time to bend the metal away from his broken knee. The blood had long since stopped flowing, choosing instead to freeze in nasty red clumps.

That's right, freeze.

Because Jotunhiem was just as cold as Tony remembered. Only this time, he was without a fire and the pleasant company. In fact, he wasn't all that sure he had any company, pleasant or not.

"Hey, asshole of the night, where are you?"

Silence was his only response. He had tried since he woke up to talk to the creature, never once getting a reply. He didn't feel it inside of him anymore, which was almost more worrying.

What if I left it behind?

Then this entire trip was fucking pointless.

I'll probably be stuck here, since I have no fucking clue how I even got here.

"You arrived to this place by a familiar path," spoke the Darkness from deep inside the cave.

Tony did his best not to tense up, attempting to remaining nonchalant about the whole 'creepy voice in the dark that reads his mind' thing.

"Nice of you to drop by. What's this, you explain things now instead of being elusive? What a lark."

"Cease your babbling, mortal scum."

"And we're back to insults. Whatever you say, Batman."

"Do not call me such names," the voice hissed in his ear, much too close for comfort.

"Yeah, well, I don't know your name, exactly. You're just a big blob of darkness. I'm calling you either Batman, or Black Hole."

"You shall not call me anything. My name is not for mortal lips."

"I take that as a compliment, buddy."

There was a soft hiss. At least it was further away now.

"Do you wish to know why Loki saved you and brought you to this very cave?"

"Not from you," Tony replied tersely. "Besides, he already told me."

"Ah yes," the voice purred. *"Love."*

"Yeah, something you have never seen or felt. I'm surprised you even know the word."

There was a snap of light in the dark, like a visible flash of irritation. It scared Tony more than the was willing to admit.

"You sad little creature. Your love is nothing but a farce. Did you truly never wonder why you forgave my Lokes so easily? After he reigned such distraction on your home?"

Tony went still, no longer fidgeting with the metal around his knee. The cave grew colder, as if the air itself had turned against him. Unusually enough, he couldn't find the words to argue, to snap back as usual. Maybe he did have doubts, but hearing this was proving something he wasn't willing

to accept yet.

"Do you want to know why Loki chose this cave? Because I told him to."

Tony could hear the nasty smile behind its words.

"Do you want to know why Loki was to fall in 'love' with you?"

Tony flinched, looking away from the dark recesses of the cave.

"Because I told him to."

"Bullshit."

"Why Stark," it drawled, once more close to his ear. **"You sound as if you do not believe your own words."**

"Shut your *face*," Tony snapped, keeping his eyes of the bright, gray sky peeking through the mouth of the cave. "Oh, that's right, you don't have one of your own. You have to steal from others."

"Your wit is failing you, mortal."

"Yeah, well... blood loss will do that to ya'."

"Do you know what came out of your little romance?"

Tony growled and bit his tongue, his mind screaming in an endless loop of denial.

No no no no no no no.

"Power."

That was not the answer Tony was expecting. He frowned and turned back to face the darkness. "What?"

"Unlimited, astounding power," it said, its voice sounding unusually excited. **"Thanks to you two, I now have access to one of the most powerful weapons in the universe."**

"The Tesseract?! But, how?"

"Fool, I mean something else entirely."

"What then? What's so damn powerful that you scoff at the Tesseract?"

"You."

Tony let out a small, panicked laugh of disbelief. "I hate to break it to you buddy, but what makes

me powerful is just a bunch of metal and wires. There's no reason you had to play Cupid with Loki and I."

"You were like a child, mortal. Underdeveloped, and not quite ripe enough for the picking. I needed Loki's magic to coax your own out of hiding. What came next was much more than I ever dreamed for."

The glee in his voice was starting to make Tony nauseous. "What the *fuck* does that mean?"

"Your powers combined in you in a way I thought not possible. That is what makes you invaluable. Your core holds such eminence power and Loki was the key to unlocking it."

"You make it sound like we had no hand in this at all," Tony snapped, his anger slowly giving way to fear. "As far as I can tell, after the whole cave visit it was all on us."

"Did you really think Loki loved a little mortal like you?"

"I did." Tony frowned. "I *do*," he corrected.

There was a laugh that echoed deep into the mountain, shattering not only the ice around him, but all of Tony's conviction.

See No Evil

Chapter Summary

How can it be, that one so cruel as loki, has friends? How can it be that a friend's face can become that of a stranger? How could it possibly be, that the most evil thing Tony has yet to meet, seems to be making sense to him.

Chapter Notes

This chapter has some different POV's. Mostly because of the content, I felt it was necessary to see the events from a different perspective.
[Unedited right now. I swear I swear it will be done tonight. Or my beta will get no love.]

Steve didn't trust Doom as far as he could throw him, and these days, that was pretty far. Victor Von Doom had lost a lot weight and some of his pompousness while he was captured by SHIELD. Still, It didn't mean he wouldn't pull a fast one on them. Oddly enough, Loki seemed to trust him. As soon as they returned to the tower, Bruce and the god had a long conversation between the two of them with Doom sitting awkwardly by their side. Steve figured if it was something he could help with, they would tell him. Still full full of doubt, he left them to it and went to visit Thor.

When Steve was still a young boy, his grandmother was suddenly no longer at home, but in the hospital. His mother would bring him in to spend time with her every day, talking about gossip and what Steve did in school. He always felt comfortable and happy to be there regardless of the other bunks of suffering people. His grandmother's smile never faltered, and she always had a story to tell. But by the end of that week, his mother no longer brought him in the room with her. Instead, she left him on his own to sit on a stool by the door. He had pretended he was a large, ferocious guard dog protecting his grandmother's room from intruders.

Steve could still remember the last time he saw her. His mother had let him skip his lessons that day to come with her, telling him to stay outside until she called him in. So he sat down and wagged his imaginary tail, pretending to bark at passers by if they seemed shady. Suddenly, from behind the door, he heard his mother crying. He gave in to his curiosity and opened the door just a crack to peer in.

Steve could not recognize the woman laying in his grandmother's bed. At the time, he thought someone has traded places with her and somehow his mother got it wrong. There was a single second where the stranger in the bed made eye contact with him, and smiled. Everything after that was a whirl of white coats and loud noises. He never forgot that stranger's face as he grew up. It wasn't until he was older that he realized it was his grandmother's dying face, not that of a stranger.

Here it was again. That other person in place of someone he knew. This warped version of Thor

that lacked all the things that made him Thor. His spirit, his rambunctiousness, even his bright blue eyes had dulled. An empty, weakened shell that sat on the bed at gazed out the window with no interest in anything around him. Steve was no long the confused little boy. He was forced to accept that this was indeed Thor. His friend was dying and there was nothing he could do about it. So he sat on the chair by the door and he did the only thing he could do. He protected him.

Doctor Doom never considered himself to be the face of true evil. Yes, he was evil in the sense that he did what he wanted regardless of other's pain. Sure, he nearly took over the world here and there. But Doom never really felt he was the epitome of evil, just one of those dark kings meant to rule. He didn't want the entire universe, it was too big for him anyway.

But Loki? Loki was the closest thing Victor had seen to 'pure evil'. It wasn't the little trick with the invisibility, or even the destruction he brought to New York. It was the way the man's eyes sparkled at the thought of pain he could inflict on others. The slight tilt to his lips at the mere mention of vile deeds. Loki enjoyed violence. Not just brutal slaughter, but clever violence that left a hurt that would never heal. This god did not simply deal death, death was always by his side.

This is why, when Loki turned those dark green eyes his way and told him he would kill Doom if he stepped out of line, he listened.

"Understood?" Loki asked.

"Perfectly," Doom replied as calmly as possible. "Shall we get started then?"

"Will you need anything? I will fetch what you need to complete this."

"I assume you can open the door for us into his mind?" Doom inquired politely. Of course he knew, the god had told him already of his attempts to heal his brother. Loki nodded, an eyebrow raised in question. Victor smiled nervously. "Then I do not need anything. Normally, I would require my equipment to enter one's mind, but I see it will not be necessary."

Doom winced internally at his own rambling. He did *try* not to irritate Loki. Doom stood up straighter. "Show me him."

Loki and Banner shared a look that confused Victor. There was some unspoken communication that each seemed to understand perfectly, leaving Doom to feel uncomfortable yet again.

"Follow me," Loki directed, turning away abruptly to lead Doom down the hall. When they reached the bedroom, he was surprised to see the captain there. Rogers was sitting facing the door with a dark expression on his face, his only move upon their entering the room was to glare up at Doom.

"Leave us," Loki said more genetically then expected.

"I would like to be here for this."

"I assure you, you would *not*."

"I can handle it," Rogers responded firmly. "Considering what I've watched you and Tony go through, I think I'm prepared."

Again, against all of Doom's expectations, the god simply nodded and gestured to him to approach the bed.

He did, all the while trying to piece together the enigma that was Loki. How could a man so full of cruelty be a part of a group of heroes? He was clearly welcomed as a friend; trusted even. Were they simply oblivious to the shadows that lay at the god's feet, and stretched far into the darkest realms. How could these people be so horribly blind to his history? How could they look him in the eye, and not see every death he had planned for them?

"Doom," Loki interrupted his thoughts. The tone was not pleasant.

"I'm ready," he responded quickly. "You may proceed."

Loki nodded and held out his hand to him. Victor reached out with more confidence than he felt, and was whisked away before he could comment further.

Blank. Everything was so empty and blank. One could not even call this white, but a lack of everything. Light, color, sound, emotions. All the things that made up memories. All the things that made a man, and they were gone.

"How is this even possible?" Doom asked, reaching out with his magic tentatively. "It is impossible to erase as thoroughly as this."

"It is not erased," Loki corrected, his hand sliding along the white-washed wall. "You should be able to feel them there, lurking behind this barrier."

Doom frowned and concentrated. The god was correct, there were things behind the wall. Whether it was Thor's memories, or a trap, he didn't know. "How confident are you that this is what you're looking for?"

Loki turned those eyes on him again, causing him to visibly shrink. "I know." Loki paused and looked back at the wall, his voice softer. "I recognize some of the feelings and sounds. I am a part of many of them."

Doom leaned his head against the wall and listened. His ears picked up laughter, but his body felt the power that was holding it back. "This is a far stronger magic than anything I have yet to come across. Please tell me I will never have the luxury of meeting the being that did this."

"You won't," Loki said, a cruel smile forming on his face. "I will kill it before you ever have a chance."

Doom nodded and closed his eyes, sending tendrils of magic into the barrier carefully. He felt for the smallest cracks, forcing his power to fill them and expand. With each small crevice he found, he filled and pushed until it connected to another one. This went on until his magic filled every part of the wall, expanding slowly.

"You might want to stand back," he directed to Loki. "This will come down with quite a crash."

"If you harm him, I will not give you the pleasure of death."

"I know," Doom replied softly. He knew the moment he met him, the things Loki had planned for him. "Stand back and be ready to leave. The flood will be strong, and we do not want to be washed away further into his mind."

"Proceed."

Doom took in a deep breath and forced every crack in the wall open at the same time. There wasn't so much of a sound, as a feeling of lightning. The wave of memories, emotions, dreams came washing over them the second the barrier was free. Then Loki was there, ripping them both back to reality where they were greeted by a scream of a man, and the clash of thunder.

Thor felt the storm surge in the sky above the tower. The fire that tore through the clouds called out to him with its familiar voice. He screamed in reply to the lightning's roar. Seconds later he felt hands on his body, pushing him down. His eyes flicked between faces, trying to find the face of the storm. He needed to respond to his lightning, he needed to reconnect.

"My... hammer," he panted, finally recognizing his brother's face above him. Loki nodded and helped him up into a sitting position.

"I will have to bring you to it, of course."

"Hurry...I fear what the storm will do."

Loki nodded and lifted his brother with a strength Thor did not know he possessed. Steve joined him on his other side, slipping an arm around to help. There was an unfamiliar man standing in the corner of the room. He did not move to assist them.

"Where is it!?" Steve yelled over the rolling thunder.

"Still in the kitchen where he dropped it."

Rogers nodded and Thor frowned, confused as to why his precious hammer was left on the floor in the kitchen. He then remembered that no one was able to lift it, forcing them to leave it where it was.

"How long?" Thor grunted to his brother.

Loki glanced at him and smiled weakly. "Months."

"Tony?"

Loki's eyes faded to an almost gray color at the mention of his lover's name. He simply shook his head and looked away down the hall in front of them. Thor's heart burned with the realization of his brother's pain. Of course, Loki was unable to use the Bifrost. He knew his brother could travel to other realms, but he did not know where Tony was. He needed Heimdrall's eyes.

"I am truly sorry," Thor spoke through gritted teeth. "I should have had them attune the Bifrost to recognize you again."

"You were simply following the rules of Odin. It is not your fault, brother."

Thor smiled faintly and stumbled on between his two companions. They reached the kitchen slowly, the storm picking up with each step nearer to his hammer. His smile widened as it came into sight, leaning slightly against one of the cabinets.

Thor reached out and grasped the handle with confidence as the room exploded with lightning, throwing both Loki and Steve across the room. Thor roared with pleasure, his armor appearing once more on his body. He felt safe for the first time in months.

"HAVE YOU BEEN GOOD?!" He called to the storm. There was a rumble in response before the lighting ceased and the wind finally died down. With a hearty chuckle, Thor hefted his hammer and looked up. He found his brother peering over the couch, his long black hair standing nearly straight up.

"Ah, Loki," he said cheerfully. "I have not seen your hair in such a state since our coming of age ceremony!"

"Of course that is what you choose to comment on," Loki drawled, gracefully crawling over the couch and smoothing down his hair. "What did you expect with all this lighting?"

Thor beamed at his brother before pulling him into a bone crushing hug. It felt good to have his strength back. It felt even better to have his precious memories.

"Thor!?"

Thor turned, and before he could respond he was attacked by several people at once. Each had managed to get at least one arm around him in one of the largest group hugs he had ever been a part of.

"Am I ever so pleased to see all of you!" He cheered, looking around at his friends. He was surprised that even the Lady Widow was there, a small smile on her usually stony face. "I feel it has been far too long since I have looked upon your faces."

"Can't you just say you missed us?" Clint asked, his voice higher than normal. He looked as though he was trying not to cry.

Thor chuckled. "I missed you all."

They all started talking at once before Thor held up a hand, smiling apologetically. "My friends, I must speak to my brother alone for a moment. We need to move quickly if we wish to save Tony."

Bruce paled at his words. "Why do you say that?"

The room had gone dead silent, the tension in the air nearly tangible. Thor let out a breath and began, "You saw what happened to my mind after the creature left me. He may not have been able to tame the beast inside of you, Bruce, but his magic easily held me captive. This was only after several minutes, imagine what it has done to Tony's mind all these months?"

Clint made a choking sound, his hand moving up to cover his mouth. "He's fine. He's stronger than any of us."

Thor continued to frown at his friends, his heart breaking as every ounce of joy left them. "I'm

afraid it may not be as simple as that," he said softly.

Loki gave him a warning look. "Do *not* tell them, Thor."

"Tell us what?" Natasha said sharply. The others stared at Loki suspiciously. He ignore them, his eyes remaining on his brother.

Thor shook his head. "They should know, brother."

"It will only cause them to lose hope..." Loki paused and turned away. "Just as I have."

"Since when have you lost hope!?" Steve shouted angrily. He looked half mad with his hair was standing up in the air, a wild, desperate look in his eyes.

They waited for a response from Loki. When they got none, Thor spoke up. "It is time," he said, looking at them sadly. "Just as time passed differently before, it will have again. It has been months here, it will have been longer or shorter there."

"What?" Bruce asked, his usually calm voice shaking. There as a slight hint of green to his complexion that was making everyone a little nervous. "What makes the difference between longer or shorter? How can we know which?"

"It will have been longer for him," Loki said at last, still looking away.

"Why?"

"Because he is not used to the traveling between realms. More than likely, he ended up on a previously used path. This coupled with his unskilled magic..."

Bruce stared at him, the last ounce of hope draining from him. "How long?"

Loki clenched his hands around his arms and didn't answer.

"How long Loki!?"

Thor watched his brother's dull, pain-filled eyes rise to meet them.

"Years," Loki said quietly and looked once more out the window. The storm was passing, the sun shining at the moment where a storm would be appropriate.

"*Please*," Tony muttered to the cold gray sky. "Please help me."

He ignored the sickening chuckle from inside the cave and continued to gaze up.

"Please help," he repeated. After a paused he sighed. "Well, fuck that. I guess that Heimdrall can't hear me or he's ignoring me."

"LIKE THE GIANT PRICK THAT HE IS!" Tony added with a shout. He winced and looked

down at his knee. He had removed most of his suit before hand, leaving only the few bent pieces of metal around the bruised skin. It hurt so badly it went full circle and had gone numb.

Well, it could also be for the fact that he was freezing to death.

"Hey, Batman," he called back into the cave. "It's what, three hours for hypothermia to set in?"

"I will not respond to that name."

"You just did, chuckles."

There a long silence before Tony shrugged and looked back at the sky with his right eye. He smiled at the memories that came from seeing the landscape. Loki's panicked voice when he thought Tony had left him alone. The fact that it was expected of him was one of the saddest things he had ever heard. Now that knew about Loki's past, and more of his personality, he wasn't all that surprised. The image of the hateful, irrational god really match the real Loki. Not his Loki.

"He is not yours, mortal."

"Uh huh, sure. Keep telling yourself that when we meet up again and fuck like rabbits."

"Sex has nothing to do with ownership," the voice responded, sounding bored of the same conversation. **"He has been with me much longer than you."**

"Yeah, and will you look at that?" Tony asked sarcastically, tilting his head back to grin upside down at the dark cave. "He hates your guts. Or lack thereof."

There was another spark in the darkness. Tony had gotten used to them now and no longer felt intimidated. Spend four days with the guy and you really begin to see around all his tricks.

Four days with nothing on other than a shirt and some jeans. His feet had been blue for the last two days. His fingers were starting to go numb as well. No amount of tucking them in his armpits seemed to help. Luckily for him, the cave was actually sort of warm. As in, possibly above 0°. Since he had no way of creating some magical fire, he was forced to curl up in the back of the cave to sleep. That meant he was surrounded by darkness and its whispers.

He ignored it. He really did. He didn't notice that the darkness knew things that Loki had whispered to him in the night. Tony ignored it when the thing re-told their story with the doughnuts and commented on how cute Loki was when he was grumpy. This darkness, this *asshole* knew all the little things that were supposed to be between just Loki and him. He ignored it. He really did. Because if he didn't, he might as well just freeze to death out here.

Maybe that's what I'm doing.

Maybe I'm not actually out here in the fucking freezing wind to talk to some asshole god.

Maybe I crawled out here to die.

"Goddamn it!" He shouted once more to the sky. "I'm not some fucking emo teenager! I just..." his voice trailed off into a mutter. "I'm just so cold."

There was another snap somewhere behind him. He rolled his eyes and glanced back, surprised to see a larger light in the cave. "What? Did the emo comment hit too close to home for you?"

There was no response, but Tony could feel the darkness waiting for something.

"Okay, time for the long crawl back into the cave." He rolled over and pulled himself across the ice. If there was one nice thing to be said about Jotunheim, it was that you could slide around like a penguin. If you, say, had a broken knee and very little strength. He somehow doubted the Frost Giants slid around on their bellies. He started to giggle uncontrollably at the mental image of Loki doing just that. There was a chuckle in response from the back of the cave.

"Hey, *no*," he growled, still pulling himself into the cave. "You don't get to laugh at that. That's mine."

"You should treat me with more kindness, mortal. For I am the only thing between you and your eventual death."

"I'm pretty sure all things die, so not a very good way to—" he stopped and stared at the sight in front of him. It was a fire. Not just a fire, but a pot, a pile of blankets, and something that smelled edible.

"What the fuck?"

"As I said, treat me with kindness and you may just survive."

Tony pulled himself the last stretch before he was nearly face to face with the fire. He felt like crying, it felt so good. He almost, just almost, thanked the asshole.

"Protecting your super-powered weapon, I see."

"Indeed, I cannot have you passing on before I teach you how to wield your magics."

Tony snorted and crawled into the pile of blankets. "You make it sound like were going to have so much fun."

"Oh, we shall have much time together."

"Sure," Tony said with a glare, wrapping up his feet with several layers of blankets. The socks really hadn't cut it against the cold. "They're probably already on their way to save me, Batman."

There was that laugh again, closer than Tony had expected. He jumped, it couldn't be helped.

"Oh, foolish mortal. We have many years ahead of us before you see anything but this frigid world."

Tony's fake smile slipped easily from his face. "Years..."

"Yes. As you know, time moves differently on each realm."

"Yeah," Tony snapped, trying to dumb down the fear that was rising. "But I was here before. It was only a few days here and a year there."

"That was different," the voice responded. "Most of the time that was displaced was during your travel between the portal and here."

"This time," he continued on, a hint of amusement in his voice. **"You tracked back through a previous path with your pathetic attempt at heroism. I simply *had* to help your magic along, lest you get lost somewhere in the void."**

"What, you don't want me to drop by? Do you keep a messy home?"

The voice hissed in irritation, **"Jest all you wish, but even I do not wish to be in the void."**

Tony's eyebrows shot up. That was unexpected news to him. He just assumed the creature lived there by choice.

"So uh, you're saying that it's going to be longer for me, than for them?"

"Precisely."

Tony twitched and swallowed the scream that threatened to rip its way from his throat. He forced his one good eye to focus on the flames in front of him, no longer caring that it gave him warmth.

"I see."

Hear No Evil

Chapter Summary

loki's rescue party seemed to be growing. With Thor and Doom for company, they are well on their way to save Tony. The big question is: Will the Tony they find be the same Tony they knew?

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the lateness of the chapter. I ended up working on several fics at once.
[Still unedited]

For all his years Loki had spent in hatred for his brother, he knew that somewhere he had always trusted him. Even when Thor did the most foolish of things, he believed that his brother would right his wrongs afterwards. So when Thor proposed his plan to Loki, he swallowed his doubts and let Thor do as he pleased. Tony was not just his to save, his friends had every right to assist. Loki scowled, trying to keep that in mind each time one of the Avengers put forth another idea.

If Odin found out that Loki had returned to Asgard before the allowed time, things would not go so well. If Odin also found out they were using not only the Bifrost, but Heimdall to search for a mere mortal, things would not go well. If Odin found out that it was Tony Stark they were looking for, Loki was more than sure he would stop them by any means necessary. In general, nothing good would come if their plan was anything less than perfect.

Loki had a perfect plan, but Thor took it in his hands and mashed it into something wholly unrecognizable. They bickered for hours, reminding Loki of their long history of similar arguments. It was only when Thor said, "This is how Tony would do it," that Loki changed his mind. It was true, that Tony's insane plans always seemed to work out in the end.

"That was a low blow there, Thor," Clint commented with a hint of disappointment.

"I only speak the truth."

"He does," Loki agreed, surprising everyone. "Anthony does have an irritatingly strange ability to succeed with little to no planning."

"I don't like being left behind like this," Steve added from across the table. Both Bruce and Natasha nodded in agreement, the later giving Loki the death glare. Loki nearly smiled at the attachment that had grown in the frigid woman for Tony.

"There is no other way. A large party of people will only draw attention to us and you are needed

here to deal with Fury."

"We know," Clint said, crossing his arms. "We don't have to like it."

"Should I come?"

Every turned in surprise as Doom entered the room.

"Why would you even want to?" Steve asked, still in shock. "You hate Tony."

"I cannot say I particularly liked the man, but I can't let such a brilliant mind go to waste. I know my abilities will be welcome on this journey."

Loki frowned, realizing what the man meant. "You are concerned for his mind."

Doom nodded and added, "It might also be best if I'm not here when Fury comes looking for me."

The group grew silent. There was an elephant in the room that no one wished to acknowledge. Several elephants, actually. Would the Tony they find be the same Tony that left them all those months ago? How were they going to deal with Fury while trying to hide the fact that the inventor was missing. Pepper had to know, of course. She had dealt with the company easily, but it was going to be hard to convince SHIELD that they weren't up to something when the one most likely to be sneaking around wasn't there to confirm or deny anything. The amount of problems seemed to be piling up around them at a grotesque rate.

"Yes, you may want join us," Loki said slowly, looking to his brother for confirmation.

Thor nodded and agreed, "he will be needed if Tony is still possessed."

"I'm liking this plan less and less as it goes on," grumbled Clint. Natasha sighed in agreement, but kept her comments to herself.

"We should go," Thor addressed Loki.

Doom approached them, ready to leave before Steve stood up and gave Thor a pat on the back. Nodding to to Loki, he smiled. "Just bring him back to us."

"Actually, before that," Bruce spoke up, approaching Loki. "I need to talk to you for a second. "He glanced at the others and added, "alone."

Loki nodded and followed him out into the hall, curious about the doctor's need for secrecy.

"Look, we both know Tony is not okay," Bruce stated quietly. "Everyone else may have an optimistic point of view, but they never had that thing banging around in their heads like I did."

Loki frowned and kept his questions to himself. Banner hadn't spoken about the possession since it happened. Once they were sure he was alright, he avoided any and all questions asked on the subject. Loki understood, having once been inside the man's mind before. He could only imagine what it was like to have two monsters fighting for control.

Bruce pulled a small gun out of his lab coat pocket. It had a capped dart at one end and a vial of blue liquid at the other. Loki raised an eyebrow, taking it into his hands. "What is this?"

"This," Bruce said with a hint of pride. "Is something I designed to knock someone out no matter how many voices you have in your head."

"How do you know it will work?"

"I tested it on me, so I would know," Bruce replied dryly. "You should probably use on Tony right away, regardless of how harmless he looks."

"Shoot first, ask questions later?"

Bruce smiled in surprise, letting out a rare chuckle. "I see Natasha and you have been spending time together."

"She is surprisingly adept in making people do what she wants. I wasn't aware that I wanted to watch the Mission Impossible movies until she and Clint had their say."

Bruce laughed a little and shook his head. "What I can't understand is why real spies would want to watch a fake spy make an ass out of them self."

"I imagine the concept is the same for you."

"True, I do get a good laugh out of Fringe."

Their smiles faded when Bruce's eyes fell once more on the gun.

"Just use it. It will put him to sleep long enough for you to get him back here. We can figure out the rest after that."

"I understand." Loki paused, still looking down at the unfamiliar weapon in his hand. "You have my thanks."

"Don't thank me yet," Bruce replied darkly. "At this point, I'm not even sure it will work on him."

"Let us hope that it is unnecessary."

"Loki," Bruce began, his voice soft yet stern. "I know you don't want to hear this, but trust me, Tony is not going to be well enough to be simply escorted home. It's going to be a fight, and I'm more than sure you don't have it in you to fight him."

"I am aware," Loki responded acidly. "I am capable of a fight if need be."

"Use it."

Loki met his eyes, holding back the fear he felt, hoping that he still seemed confident. He frowned and glanced away. "I will."

"Stop it!" Tony snapped at the back of the cave.

"But Tony, you seem so lonely."

"Shove it up your non-existent ass. You don't give a fuck about my feelings."

"I care about your well being. Unlike some people."

Tony snarled and threw the crystal he was practicing on at the darkness. "Shut. The. Fuck. Up." He paused, Feeling a small amount of satisfaction at the sound of the crystal shattering. "You promised last week you wouldn't do it anymore."

"But you like hearing Loke's voice, don't you?"

"I don't want to hear it anymore. So stop."

A rolling chuckle echoed throughout the cave. **"You sound better than last month. Who was it who was crying all night for his darling? Mortal's are so fickle."**

"So says the asshat who won't teach me any healing or teleportation magic," Tony reminded him angrily. "Thanks for the fucking blankets. Oh, and not letting me heal my goddamn leg properly."

"We can't have you running away, Tony. Who would be your teacher?"

"Fuck you. I doubt I'll ever be able to walk again you selfish dick." Tony took a breath and picked up another crystal. "I won't be much of a weapon if I'm limping around."

"I will teach you in due time," the voice purred. **"When you are less temperamental."**

Tony snorted and cast a pointed look at the dark shadows of the cave. "It's like you didn't learn a thing about me this entire time."

There was a snicker for an answer, then silence. Tony looked around once more and took it as his cue to continue practicing. For the past six months all he was able to do was make some crystals fill with energy and light a fire. It was sort of helpful for those days he had major panic attacks. He kept a bunch of energized crystals around for when it took all of his energy just to keep breathing. They kept him alive and helped him crawl around the cave.

At first, that bastard's false Loki voice calmed him. It would get him breathing again and further away from blacking out. Eventually, it started to make things worse, so for a while the thing stopped. It had started again this week for no apparent reason other than to harass him.

Ever the charmer.

"Can I try something?" He asked, staring down at the blue, glowing stone in his hand.

"What are you attempting?"

"Just watch..." Tony replied, his mind already forming a visual description of what he wanted to do. It had been hard, at first, for him to understand how magic worked. All the previous times he use it, it was an intense and untamed force unleashed without him even knowing how. It was a long month of schooling before he realized the problem wasn't his capabilities, but his mind. Yes, his

brilliant mind was actually standing in the way of being a wizard. Who'd of thought that genius and magic didn't go together? Loki must have been a special case.

The problem lay in the way his mind formulated around a problem. The darkness started with the issue of 'cold'. How do you fix the problem? So Tony started thinking, and planning, and making lists. That's where the creature stopped him.

"You use too many words," he said irritably. **"You must free your mind of the labels and focus on the actions."**

It was easier said than done. Science was all about labels.

'Hydroxide'

'Warning, flammable'

'Poison'

'Do not drink, you idiot'

So to Tony, it was like taking himself back to kindergarten. He had to see Jane run, not judge her trajectory and the velocity needed to catch the ball.

"Okay, you watching?"

"Of course."

Tony grinned and let the magic go, a shimmering cloud forming in front of him. The cloud wavered and changed into the blurry shape of his suit.

"Ha!" he shouted with triumph. The image flickered and disappeared soon after. "Aww, come back baby."

"Quite impressive. I am happy to see you taking the initiative."

Tony nearly laughed. Of course he had been practicing when he left the cave. He would crawl out and sit on top of the cliff, pushing his magic until he could barely see anymore. It wasn't just some sudden burst of genius, he had worked hard to get this far.

Looking around at the small piles of lightly glowing crystals, Tony let out a long sigh. "I don't suppose you'll teach me anything new before the year is up?"

"I was planning to teach you to change your form this week."

Tony perked up at that, dropping another crystal into the pile.

"Why wait, let's do this thing."

There was a pause before the voice spoke from behind his shoulder. **"It can only be a small part of you at first. I do not wish to have you half transform and somehow mutilate yourself."**

"You almost sound like you care about my pretty face."

"You wish."

Tony laughed, satisfied with the snarky response. It seemed his personality was rubbing off on the

creature. "Teach me to change, oh mighty teacher of mine."

"That is the spirit," the voice purred.

An hour later, Tony was able to change his eye color. He had to take the darkness' word for it, because he had no way to tell seeing as he was lacking his full length mirror. Not that he would want to see what he looked like right now.

He did get a weird itchy feeling behind his eyes when they supposedly changed. Tony assumed that was a sign that it was working. After that, everything was much easier. He gave himself slimmer, more ladylike fingers. He amused himself for a while changing his hair color over and over again. Luckily, his hair had grown out almost to his shoulders, giving him the chance to see the change.

At some point during his experimentations, his teacher had began to hum. It was the same song as always, the tune already embedded in Tony's mind.

"Hey," Tony said, looking up after reverting his hands back to his usual callused ones. "What is that song, anyway?"

There was no answer but the continuous humming from the depths of the cave.

"No really, it better not be some slowed down Hendrix shit."

The song continued on without pause. So, Tony gave up and changed his hair to 'Hotrod Red', humming along. After all, he knew the song by heart.

Loki listened intently through the sounds of the Bifrost for any hint if the song Tony spoke of. He had not heard it the first time through and was not going to fail Tony again, if by some chance it was there. Because if it was, it meant Tony was close and that maybe, just maybe, he and the creature had separated.

He heard nothing but the tune of the Bifrost around him, each color chiming with its own magic. Loki smiled to himself sadly, remembering that he was one of the few people who could hear the Bifrost sing. Thor would never be able to see it as more than a tool, where as Loki saw its beating heart.

Odin told him once, many years ago, that only strong magic users could sense it, let alone hear its song. Loki had been so proud when he first heard it. He cried into his mothers arms on their arrival to Alvhiem. He was never able to fool the elves with his immovable mask after that. No matter how many years had passed, they always remembered the young boy crying at the beauty of fine magic.

His smile faded with the song, their inevitable arrival to Asgard approaching far too soon. With the last notes of magic, their eyes filled with the sight of gold.

"You," Heimdall commanded, "are not allowed to be here."

"I would not be here if I were not in dire need of assistance," Loki replied carefully.

The gatekeeper's eyes widened slightly before he muttered quietly, "I know of whom you speak. The mortal has called to me many times over the months."

"You mean to tell me," Loki hissed, his forced calm giving way to shaking with rage. "That you have been listening to his pleas for help, and done nothing?!"

"I am forbidden to aid him, considering who he is and the creature he resides with."

"You could have spoken to me!" Loki shouted, startling both Thor and Heimdall.

The gatekeeper frowned slightly, unaccustomed to Loki expressing his emotions so strongly. "Asgard is not on speaking terms with you currently. I should not be speaking to you, even now."

"He is an innocent man," Loki spat, ignoring Thor's pleading look. "You watched him suffer all these months, and you could not bend a simple rule to save him. If not for your pride, he could have been saved from the torture."

Thor touched Loki's shoulder gently. "Brother, he did what he—"

"No," Heimdall said softly. "Loki is correct. The man is innocent and should not have suffered alone because of my poor judgment."

Loki sneered, not gracing him with an answer. Instead, he turned away, clenching and unclenching his hands as angry green flames curled between his fingers.

From behind him he heard the gatekeeper say, "I shall send you to him immediately."

"You will not tell father of this," Thor demanded. "You owe us that much."

Heimdall's reply was lost under the ringing in Loki's ears.

I will not kill the gate keeper.

I will not kill the gate keeper.

I will not kill...

"Loki," came Thor's voice.

Loki turned to face them both. He glared into Heimdall's golden eyes and asked, "Where is he?"

A flicker of concern came and went in Heimdall's face. "Jotunhiem."

"Of course," Loki hissed, cursing his own foolishness for not thinking of it sooner. Of course Tony would have ended up there. It was the most recently traveled path to Midgard other than the Bifrost.

"Brother," Thor spoke softly, bring Loki back from his bout of self hatred. "We should go."

"Fine." Loki let his eyes meet Heimdall's once more, his anger slipping away as his emotionless mask fell once more into place. "We will be returning by my paths, so we have no further need for

you."

"Loki, you wear yourself too thin," Began Heimdall "Take the Bifrost to—"

"Silence!" Loki snarled, his eyes growing dark with a deep rage. "You have no right to comment on my state of health, seeing as you are to blame for all these months of waiting."

The gatekeeper nodded once and shoved the sword into its place, starting the Bifrost suddenly. Thor let out a startled yelp as they were sucked into the rainbow stream once more.

They arrived in a swirl of snow, the ground beneath them cracking from the Bifrost's strength. Doom gaped openly at the ruined world, keeping silent but clearly fascinated by the story of the realm. Thor stood still, only his eyes moving over the scarred landscape. This was his first time retuning here after the inhalation of the Frost Giants, and Loki knew what it was he would see in his brother's eyes. He watched with a strange tension as his brother surveyed the ruined structures before Thor's blue eyes fell to him.

Judgment and pity. What did he expect from Thor, the golden child. The one who could do no wrong, who never hurt anyone. Of course the bumbling oaf was disappointed in his brother yet again. Another mess made by Loki to be ignored or cursed for. Another reason for Thor to wonder who this person he called 'brother' truly was. Loki felt something in their newly melded bond crack, the dark waters of doubt seeping in. He hissed and turned away, ignoring Victor Von Doom's look of confusion.

"Anthony will most likely be in the cave," he called over his shoulder, not bothering to wait for a response. Loki set off at a fast pace, wanting nothing more than to teleport directly to the cave and leave his judgmental brother behind. Loki began weighing his options.

*If I go there now, will I be able to manage the journey home?
I have so little power after these past few months.
To transport us home without the aid of the Bifrost takes more magic than—*

"Loki!"

He slowed, his shoulders tensing as a familiar hand smashed against his spine. There's another thing he hated that he should have put a stop to many years ago. He may be a god, but Thor put way too much force into his cheerful back slapping.

Loki felt his body tense further, his anger coiling up and ready to burst. He did not want to talk about this. Not now, not ever. Stark was so close, and yet his dearest brother wanted waste time and *talk*.

"Loki, I do not want you to misunderstand," Thor said, moving in front of him and scowling at Loki's expressionless face.

Loki smiled a wide, fake grin. "I misunderstand nothing. Shall we go?"

"You are clearly angry at me based on some misled assumptions of my behavior."

Loki blinked and stared at his brother, trying to see through the front. Except, there was no front. No mask to hide behind. No inner turmoil waiting to bubble over into reality. Thor wasn't hiding his emotions, he was showing Loki exactly how he felt without reserve. There was the same

pitying look in his eyes, coupled with a slight frown of frustration.

"Why?" Loki asked, his eyes fixed on his face, watching for any hints of a lie.

"Why what?"

"Why do you have pity for *me*?" Loki asked carefully before glancing away. He didn't want to let his brother see his own mask slipping. "It seems out of place considering where we are."

When no answer came, Loki glanced to the side to see Thor looking out over the ice with far away eyes. Something had changed since he awoke from his forced mental capture. He seemed older and more tired.

"Because this was both your family, and your enemies," he said, his eyes still far away.

"They were never my family," Loki snapped, looking out at the smaller ruins of the villages. Homes built for families, not kings. An old ice crawled over his heart and froze in place, protecting him. Keeping him from feeling anything. Keeping him safe.

"Who is your family, then? Is it Odin, Frigga, myself?" Thor asked quietly, his tone stern. "Who qualifies to be family to the great and powerful Loki?"

"Anthony," he replied before Thor even finished his breath.

His brother let out a huff of laughter and ran a hand through his long hair. "I suppose he is your family now. I did not think it were possible, but he has gotten closer to you than anyone."

Loki frowned and peered at his brother, unwilling to admit that those words saddened him. Thor had not fought for his right to be called brother. Instead, he let it go. He admitted that Stark was his only family.

"Thor," he spoke softly. "You *are* my family."

A smile started to form on the thunderer's tired face.

"As narrow minded, annoying, and an all around gluttonous imbecile that you are."

"I love you too, Loki."

Loki snickered, relaxing without realizing it. He was startled by Doom's voice from behind him.

"Do you hear... singing?"

Their arrival to the cave was rather anticlimactic. Everyone was tense and ready for a fight, only there was none to be had. No one greeted them at the cave entrance, the only hint that someone was living there being the small fire flicking in the back.

Loki frowned as he peered into the darker recesses of the cave, curious about the secondary source of light. The entire place stunk of magic, excessive amounts of it in fact.

Dangerous amounts.

"Anthony...?"

There was a flicker of light in the back and a giggle. Loki balled his hands into fists, ready to fire at the darkness. Before he could begin his attack, the cave began to glow with light from thousands of small, energy filled crystals. They grew brighter and brighter before a human shaped shadow formed at the center of them. It laughed once more, and was gone.

All three of them stood, confused but alert for further movement. When it became clear that the creature was no longer in their presence, Loki turned to Thor.

"If that was he, then where is—"

"BATMAN!? What the hell was that?"

Loki spun at the sound of Stark's voice. It was coming from somewhere out and above the cave. There was a scratchy, sliding noise before Tony rolled into view at the mouth of the cave.

His cheeks were flush, his breath coming in small pants. What was left of his clothing was a mix of patches from what looked like a rough blanket. His beard and hair were long, but oddly clean. What startled Loki most, were his blue eyes.

"S- Stark?"

Tony froze, half sitting up from the frozen ground. His face quickly shifted from shock to rage.

"I SAID NO MORE!" He screamed, sitting up fully, but not leaving the ground. Thor jumped back in surprise, smashing into Doom and sending him sprawling into a pile of crystals. It was noisy and almost comedic, but Stark never took his eyes off of Loki.

Loki stepped a little closer, reaching with his magic for the dart gun. "Anthony, what is wrong?"

"Shut up you fucking, vile piece of shit!" Tony snarled, still sitting on the ground. "You promised me you would stop, yet here you are, fucking me over again."

His breath was coming in shorter bursts. Tony clutched at his chest and started to hyperventilate.

Loki, unsure of what to do, knelt down in front of him warily.

"Anthony," he said quietly, noting the flinch his voice caused. "Tell me, who do you think I am?"

"Bat... man."

Doom let out a startled laugh from back in the cave. "Did he just say Batman?"

Tony froze, no longer breathing as his eyes slid from Loki in front of him to Doom.

"Why are you here?" He asked, his voice more calm. "Why would you be...?"

"I'm here to help your mind from the clutches of the 'Darkness'."

Tony blinked slowly and turned to Loki once more. "Wait... you're real?"

"Do I not look real to you?" Loki asked, reaching a hand out to him.

Tony paled further and flinched back a little, panic in his eyes.

"This is a nightmare again... Don't..." He stuttered to a stop and shuffled backwards a little. "Don't make him hurt me again... anyone but Loki."

Loki's frown deepened, a sharp pain growing in his chest.

Ah, at last...

I can feel our connection again.

I can feel his pain and fear.

"Tony," he began, reaching out and touching the mortal's hand gently. "It is truly me. The darkness fled when we arrived."

"We have arrived," he added quietly. "Albeit, far too late."

Tony stared down at the hand touching his, taking in slow, painful gasps of air. "This can't be happening for real. I've seen this too many times for it to be true."

"How may I prove it to you?"

Tony's eyes darted from Loki to Thor, to Doom. He paused on his fellow inventor and let out a huff of amusement. "You have to be real. Batman wouldn't have thought up a jackass like him just to torture me."

"Hey!"

Tony laughed, a ragged tired sound that had little resemblance to his usual tone. "This is *real*..." His eyes sharpened. "You said he left?"

"He used these crystals to jump from the realm," Loki replied calmly, still wary of Tony's mood. "I no longer feel his presence."

Tony's eyes dulled, his face going slack. "The crystals... all this time he made me fill those fucking things up just so he could escape?"

"These," Loki gestured behind him to the dark crystals. "Were all from you?"

"Yeah, I've been putting power into them since..." He stopped and looked down at his hands. "Since forever."

"Why? That must have drained you considerably!"

"He said it was practice...."

Loki bit his lip, trying with all his power to keep from holding his lover tightly. He was still unsure of Tony's mental stability right now. Suddenly hugging him could set off another panic attack, or worse.

"Anthony, why—"

"Don't call me that," he snapped at Loki. "Ever. Again."

Loki flinched back slightly, drawing his hand away. Stark snatched it in his and pulled it close to his chest, making a soft, begging sound. Loki's chest tightened more with pain.

"Tony," he said quietly, giving his lover's hands a reassuring squeeze. "Why are your eyes blue?"

Stark snapped his head up and blinked. "Are they? Are they seriously?!" He let out a happy woop and wriggled a little where he sat. "It actually worked. No shit!"

Thor came closer, feeling the mood shift from a less dangerous topic. "What worked, Tony?"

"I change them a while back. I guess I forgot to revert them to good ol' ugly brown."

"Brown is not ugly," Loki said stiffly, confused a little annoyed. "But how did you learn?"

Tony frowned, his strange, blue eyes filled with a wave of emotion. "I had an interesting teacher."

"The darkness?" Loki asked incredulously.

"Yeah, he was helpful. Although," Tony sneered, "he did only teach me enough to keep him well stocked in magic, and for mild entertainment."

"Your eye is healed," Loki muttered, just now realizing that Tony had not moved from the ground. His leg was heavily wrapped in scraps of blankets, laying out to his side limply. "Yet not your leg," he added bitterly.

"He healed the eye in my sleep after I sort of accidentally fell off the cliff side by accident," Tony said. He shrugged and added, "The leg never set right."

"I will fix it when we return home. I do not have enough magic to heal you and send us back."

"Why not? What have you been up to?"

"I was attempting to heal Thor," Loki replied.

"Heal him?" Tony asked, raising an eyebrow at the perfectly healthy ,blond god behind Loki.

"I was unwell after the creature entered my mind," Thor spoke, his voice hinting at his exhaustion. "My brother and Doctor Doom helped me free myself from his curse."

"What did he do you to, buddy? You look dead tired and maybe a little older...." Tony tilted his head. "Is that a gray hair I see?"

Ignoring his question, Thor moved closer and crouched down to look Stark over. There was a slight frown on his face when he asked, "Why are you unharmed?"

"Does the bad leg not count? Or the bruises? How about all the cuts from falling off a cliff? Or does my wounded pride not count either?"

Doom joined them, staying behind the two gods. "He means your mind, Stark."

Tony rolled his eyes. "He wasn't in there all that often. Mostly when he felt like... *punishing* me for shit."

Thor's frown deepened, sending a meaningful look to Loki on his right. Loki promptly ignored the look, choosing to focus on his lover instead.

"You seem well enough to come with us now," he said, standing and pulling Stark up on his one good leg. "Shall we depart?"

"Yeah," Tony replied eagerly before glancing back into the cave. "Uh, let me just grab something."

"Actually, can someone just get it for me?" He asked, smiling nervously. "This is the most vertical I've been all year."

"How have you been moving around?" Loki asked, slipping his arm around Stark's waist.

"Long story, not that fun to listen to. Doom, you get it."

"What is it I am looking for?" Doom replied once he reached the area that looked most lived in.

"A notebook. It should be right there."

While Doom tossed some crystals around, muttering under his breath, Thor moved closer to Tony. His frown was still firmly in place. This brought a strange irritation to Loki.

"Tony," Thor began again, "The being has always attempted to kill you before now. What has changed so much that he would not only let you live, but aid in your survival?"

Thor could not see Tony's face from where he was standing. Loki was glad, for the moment, that he was spared the sight.

The tense, cheerful mask slipped away to expose the utterly raw anguish that lurked behind it. Loki knew that Tony had kept that facade up for himself all this time. Lying to himself to get by. Fooling himself that he was alright, that nothing had changed in him.

He *had* changed. He was no longer the genius billionaire who always pulled through with his sharp wit and clever plans. Tony had become a haunted, tortured man. He lost something that Loki feared would never come back. Something Loki knew he himself could never return to his lover.

Tony's answer came out slowly, as if dragged from the depths of the cave itself. "I'm *special*."

"Special?"

"You don't want to hear it, Thor," Tony replied, his hollow eyes fixed on the frozen floor.

"We need to know..." Thor pushed once more.

Tony chuckled darkly. "I'm a weapon, and no power in the 'verse can stop me."

Speak No Evil

Their journey home was not as pleasing as Loki wished it to be.

The relief Loki had been expecting to feel never came, leaving him drained and empty. It did not help that Tony refused to speak anymore than simple yes or no answers, If he spoke at all.

After convincing him that blue eyes were not the best choice considering a certain staff, Stark grudgingly changed them back. Loki nearly sighed with relief at the sight of those brown eyes, as if some sense of normalcy had finally returned. But Tony's eyes grew hard and dark when they began their travel. Even with strain on Loki's concentration, he felt how strongly Tony clung to him as he transported them between worlds.

When they did arrive home, Loki could barely stand. He was physically and mentally exhausted, having pushed himself too far at last. All the work on Thor in the past few months had, indeed, stretched him thin. Heimdall was never wrong in his observations, his eye saw far more than the physical world. Loki was tired. He was worn down, beaten, and thirsty for his full power.

Unfortunately, their arrival was noticed by all, giving him no chance to slink away to rest. Immediately there were hugs and strong pats on the backs. Doom was pointedly left out of the group hugs. He moved to lurk around the edge of the room to avoid any further awkwardness. When they all went for the inventor with happy tears in their eyes, he smiled at them nervously.

Instead of hugging them, Tony pushed them away, flinching back and muttering to himself. He hobbled backwards until he was against the wall before everyone stopped trying to touch him. Loki watched the pain and fear flicker across the group's faces before he could no longer stomach it. He saw the doctor attempting to catch his eye. Ignoring the man's obvious attempts, he shuffled a little away. Bruce came directly over and gave Loki a hard, searching look.

"Couldn't do it?"

"The beast resided outside of his mind," Loki replied testily. "It wasn't needed."

"That's not the only thing it was for. I think," Bruce said, glancing at where Stark stood, still avoiding any physical contact. "You should have used it."

"He is fine and well. Simply a little shaken, perhaps."

Bruce gave him another searching look, as if dissatisfied with what he found the first time. "I don't need some magical soul connection to know he's not 'fine'. He's about two seconds away from a break down and you're probably the only one who can feel it."

"You should be able to feel it at least. Unless you guys aren't as in tune with one another," he added wearily.

Loki's irritation grew at Bruce's implications. He gave up when the man stared back as if challenging him, and leaned heavily against the wall. Turning his focus from his own exhaustion to the tense waves coming off of his lover, Loki frowned. Tony's emotions were running at full power. It was as though someone had turned everything on at once and amplified it.

Loki closed his eyes and let the sounds of Tony's thoughts trickle back through the Mind Link once more. It was slow and oddly laborious for him to establish a connection that he could control. It had been far too long for both of them. Loki was surprised he could even still access his lover's mind, considering the events that lead up to their separation.

He realized, then, that Tony had no walls up at all. There was no resistance, not because Loki was welcome to his mind, but because the creature had left Tony's mind wide open.

Left him raw and bleeding.

Just like he did me when he threw me to Thanos.

The mere thought was enough to make Loki sick. The nausea only grew as Stark's words began to grow louder in his mind.

No. Don't touch me.

You cut me apart again again on a steel table.

No no no wasn't real.

Thor is angry and it's all electricity in my brain and he smiles.

No.

The spies. The spies pretend to be friendly, but Fury is pulling their strings.

So why was I surprised when she stabbed me?

Five times from each of them.

So angry. The glee in their eyes.

No

Not real.

You broke my bones.

You flayed my skin.

Oh

Please

Don't touch me.

Loki forced the bile that rose in his throat back down, jerking his eyes open just before his knees gave out. Bruce let out a shout of surprise and attempted to hold him up. Loki began to drag the doctor down with him until strong arms came and lifted him from the floor.

Thor.

How could his brother still have such strength after such a long battle in his own mind? Even the mighty thunderer got tired, which was clear by the dark shadows that still lined Thor's eyes.

Loki nearly smiled at his brother's selflessness, shaking his head to clear his mind. "I am fine," he said, meeting his brother's blue eyes. "Please, I'm fine, brother."

Thor gave him a weak smile, his eyes flickering to Tony nervously. Loki frowned at the oddity of Thor actually being subtle in forcing Loki's attention to something. Then, he too glanced at Stark.

Tony hadn't moved, unless you count leaning more heavily against the opposite wall and the way his hands clutched the fabric wrapped around his wounded leg. He was staring at them with wide, terrified eyes, as though he were surround by a pack of wolfs instead of his friends.

Something in Loki's expression must have startled the others. Everyone who had looked around at

Bruce's shout stopped and looked at Tony once more. Whatever words they had wished to speak fell short at the look on Tony's face. What was already a stressful situation seemed to grow heavier for him with their added eyes.

"No..." he muttered quietly.

Steve made a sound between a sob and disbelieving laugh. "Tony, we aren't gong to hurt you."

Something closer to the normal sharpness returned to Stark's eyes again. He narrowed them at the captain and hissed, "Like you haven't said that to me a hundred times."

Steve faltered as if hit by a heavy blow. "Me...?"

Tony's eyes widened again, his hands releasing the grip on his leg. He crossed his arms in front of him. "No, no, no... not you. You're real." He paused. "You are real, right?"

"Everyone here is real, Tony."

"So you would say," Tony replied slowly, his eyes wandering around the room. He paused on Loki and forced a small smile.

Loki tried to smile back, and felt it take the form of a grimace. He could barely function anymore, let alone respond correctly to the situation. His own pain was enough to flatten a lesser god, but Tony's added weight was simply tearing him apart. For the first time since the Mind Link started developing, Loki wished they had no such connection. Not only the ability to speak to one another in the most intimate ways, but the shared suffering, or pleasure.

If it were gone, Loki could actually focus. Then, he would have the strength to heal Tony. Then, he would not have to bare the memory of his own lover's fear of him. The sight of his own image hurting Tony over and over again.

Loki stumbled forward, shaking off the kindness of his brother and Banner like a cat. He pushed past everyone else, ignoring Natasha's humming sound in warning, to reach his panicked lover.

He would do as he had planned to from the start. Stark was his to take care off. Stark was still his, and his alone.

"An— Tony," he began carefully. "Why not rest a while before confronting all of your demons."

Tony snorted, his expression slipping into his 'accessible' mode. The Stark that was easy to talk to, sharp, and bright. It was startling to watch how quickly he was able to revert back to it. Loki wondered vaguely if the others would feel betrayed to know how easily he fooled them most days. How fake his smiles could be, or his happiness. He supposed they would all know better now, after watching the panicked Tony give way to a perfect calm, rational Stark.

"My demons are..." Tony's voice came out raspy. He paused, mid fake smile, and looked confused. "Well, they're nastier versions of all of you guys."

"Not my choice," he added as Clint's expression turned to hurt. "He chose you guys for a reason."

"How long were you there?" Natasha asked, her voice strangely high.

Loki watched carefully for Tony's response, wondering the same thing. Tony's face remained the same confident smile, but instead, Loki was nearly thrown over by the explosive force of Tony's internal screaming. It echoed throughout his mind, tearing through his soul much like Fury's machine did.

He shook his head once, twice, and was forced to block it out. Another wave of nausea hit him. Sickness for the sound of Tony's screams. Disgust for blocking Tony out from him. Self loathing for losing him all those months ago.

"Oh," Tony said almost cheerfully. "I don't really know. I didn't exactly have a way to mark the time."

From somewhere across the room, Doom made a small noise. If the rest of the group hadn't been so tense and silent, they might have missed it all together.

Tony turned his charming smile to his fellow inventor, his eyes meeting Doom's with a level gaze. Something dark twisted its way through the cheerful facade and growled at Doom. Victor looked away, visibly shaken, and said no more.

Loki smiled bitterly at the lie, wondering why Stark felt the need to hide it. There was the notebook that he had nearly ripped from Doom's hands as soon as the inventor brought it to him. The same notebook that clearly did have the markings of time passing. Why, of all things, was it a secret?

"Yeah, I think I'll lay down before I chat up my demons again," Tony said, making a show of stretching and yawning.

They let him go. The group allowed the phoniness and lies to wash over them, because they could do nothing else. Tony needed to get better, and that was what was the most important thing right now.

Loki, once again, felt something of a friendship with the mortals. Or, at least, a much stronger level of appreciation for them. The feeling of closeness to this group seemed to be happening more often. He still hadn't decided if he liked it or not.

Loki joined him on his journey upstairs, leaving behind a sea of worried faces. Tony wasn't all that sorry to be leaving them behind. They were, after all, all the faces of his imaginary tormenters.

The god helped him make it to the bed, being his legs for him since he was still unable to manage himself. It left a bad taste in his mouth. He wasn't blind to the fact that Loki was just as exhausted as he was. Probably even more exhausted than he was letting on.

Tony groaned, the softness of the bed almost painful to his body. The unfamiliar feeling threw his mind into a mild panic. Where was his hard cave floor? Where were his rough blankets to curl up under?

"Tony," Loki spoke near his shoulder, placing a gentile hand on his back. "May I sleep next to

you?"

Tony grunted in approval. "Do you even need to ask?"

"Yes"

Tony opened his eyes and started at the burgundy sheet in front of him. He went over the past few hours in his mind with careful deliberation. Loki had been nothing but careful and loving. The god had gone above and beyond to take care of him, and Tony had thrown it back in his face over and over again.

He knew why he had no control over his body's reactions, but he had to be honest with himself. Some of it could have been avoided. He could have done better for Loki, could have sucked it up and faced his fears. With every flinch away from the god, Loki's mask grew more solid.

*The man I love is blocking me out and, god damn, does Loki have every right to.
Not that that makes me feel any better about it.*

"If you don't mind the smell," he finally said, "go for it."

He felt Loki's body slip into the bed next to him, careful not to touch him at all. Tony smiled bitterly to himself, and swallowed his fears. Turning carefully, still battered and broken enough that every movement ached, he snuggled into Loki's body. The god gave a soft gasp in surprise, but otherwise seemed pleased at Tony's decision.

"You do smell rather badly, love," Loki mumbled into his ear.

"Am I displeasing to your godly sensibilities?"

"I am rather sure you would be displeasing to a pig's sensibilities right now," Loki said with a soft chuckle.

Tony let out a huff of laughter, snuggling in closer. Loki felt so real.

*He is real, idiot.
He came and saved you again.*

A smaller, colder voice whispered from the recesses of his mind,

Yeah, just like he did back then. Just like he did under the orders of him.

Tony tensed slightly, feeling for the first time like he was in the arms of a stranger. He stayed there regardless of his unease, beyond exhausted but wired with fear and something else.

He finally started to drift off when he placed a name to the emotion.

Anger.

Tony woke up so violently he threw himself right off the bed.

"Ooowwwfuucckkk everything," Tony groaned from the floor, his eyes closed tightly against the pain. Loki followed him off the bed in seconds, lifting him from the floor in one swift moment.

Tony's eyes snapped open, a wave of fear washing over him. "S-stop!"

Loki froze, still holding Tony's body in his arms carefully.

"Just..." Tony glanced away. "Just put me down. Okay?"

Loki nodded and placed him back down near the bed, looking down at him with an unreadable expression. Tony tried not to squirm as more bad memories flooded his brain.

Loki is laughing at me as I fall off the cliff again and again.

Loki throwing me out the window, only this time, he follows me down to the ground. The last thing I see is Loki's smile before we hit the pavement together.

Loki kissing Steve before gutting him.

Laughing.

Loki is always laughing.

He winced before glancing once more at the god. Loki's face seemed only to close off further with every awkward moment between them.

"Lokes," he started, unsure of how to breach the subject.

"Yes?"

"Why did you save me?"

Pain flickered across Loki's face before he answered, "Because you were lost... and because I love you."

Tony stared up at him in confusion before he realized that the god hadn't understood what he meant. He kept forgetting that this Loki wasn't prying on his thoughts all the time.

"No, I mean *originally*," he said more quietly, feeling a little guilty for pushing the topic.

"From the portal?"

"Yeah."

Loki paused, looking slightly disappointed. "The same reasons."

"You didn't love me back then," Tony reminded him carefully.

"No... But I still had reasons to rescue you," Loki agreed, looking more and more like he would rather not talk about it.

Tony sighed and finally brought himself to meet the god's eyes. He was going to have to be blunt about it.

"Why the fuck did you save me when you hardly knew me?" Tony asked, trying to keep his voice steady. "When we were enemies only minutes before." Tony came to a stop, feeling all the fear and resentment of the past year bubble to the surface.

"Why did you suddenly *need* to help me?"

Loki grasped for words, finding it difficult to explain. "It was... it was simply the right thing to do."

Tony scoffed quietly, crossing his arms as if shielding himself from Loki's words. "The right thing to do, huh? From what you told me, even before your little trip down Thanos lane, you didn't exactly care for 'the right thing'." Tony paused, his eyes darkening. "So really, *why* did you save me?"

"I just," Loki began, growing more frustrated by the second. "I just *had* to."

Tony's face hardened at his words, not a single hint of amusement left in his eyes. "And doesn't that sound *exactly* like you weren't in control of your desires?"

"I already spoke to you about my previous fascination with you," Loki replied with a confused frown. "Why is it so surprising that I offered my help?"

Tony's reply came back too fast and practiced. It had clearly been on his mind for quite some time.

"You never wondered why, out of anyone on the team, it was me you just *had* to save?" Tony's smile was not kind as he continued, "It never occurred to you that I was a little too 'fascinating' to you?"

Loki felt his blood turn to ice in his veins. He finally understood what Stark had been hinting at this entire time. That Loki was being controlled, a mere puppet to another more powerful being. His rescue of Tony was at the whims of another and perhaps, even that his love for the mortal was, in fact, all a lie.

The ice melted quickly as a hot rage filled his body. "What, *exactly*, do you mean by this?"

"I think you know damn well what I mean. Batman may not be the most reliable source, but of all the shit he said, that was the most plausible thing I'd heard the entire time," Tony snapped in response, taking a small step back. It was probably an unconscious action on his part, considering the months spent being tortured by Loki's own image. Tony was retreating, even while his words attacked him.

At that moment, Loki didn't give a damn about that. He was not going to stand here and let the man he had nearly died for, yet again, tell him he was lying.

"You truly believe that creature's word over *mine*?"

Loki watched as a shadow fell over Tony's face, as if uttering the words had drawn the darkness to

them. He froze for a moment, honestly fearing that he had brought the beast back. With a small movement, the shadow shifted off of Stark's face enough to reveal a solid determination.

"Yes."

Something old and dark crawled out of the cave in Tony's memory. It roared like fire and took shape of his first suit, born of necessity. A creature made to survive.

No other suit since then had been so heavy to wear, and he wasn't talking about the physical weight. The need was never as strong as the first day he used a metal suit to save himself.

The memory was a curse and a blessing. Always there to remind Tony of his own sadistic cruelty, or the weakness of his own heart. The roar was the fire that killed his captives, and sound that drowned out those last painful words spoken by Yinsen.

Caves. It was always about caves.

The darkness had used Loki's voice to torment him. But Tony knew all along that the one thing torturing him the most was the knowledge that they were set up. Set up by some creepy, shadowy Cupid with ulterior motives. Made to act out a little play, not all that different than the sickening theatrics Obadiah designed for Tony's capture.

Loki's voice somehow managed to quiet the roar. Loki always managed to take center stage.

"I know what is my will, and what is another's. You really think me so weak to fall under his control?"

"Yeah, I think that," Tony replied, sounding nastier than he intended. Oh well, he was feeling pretty nasty right now. "Did you just forget the whole Thanos thing? Or was that all a lie?"

Loki's lip curled in rage. Tony remembered the last time he had seen that expression in the god's face, sometime after his little comment on performance issues. It had been a long time since Tony had seen him that angry.

"You dare say that to me?!" the god spat, his face crumbling into despair. "After all this time, you say this to me... now"

Something about the way the last word fell from Loki's mouth stopped Tony's roaring beast in its tracks. It had sounded more like a choked sob, than a word. Something desperate and nearly pleading.

Tony faltered, the angry fire running through him beginning to die. "No..." He said softly, then suddenly blurted out, "I'm sorry!"

Loki froze, still panting. "What?"

"I didn't mean it like that," Tony said quietly, still trying to find his words. He ran a hand over his face, suddenly feeling deflated and tired.

"I don't think you're lying about anything, actually. I was just trying to make a point," he said from behind his hand. "You *have* been controlled before. It's not too far of a stretch to wonder if you were this time too."

"I was not controlled," Loki snapped back, his breath catching. "Perhaps... Perhaps we were... persuaded in the beginnings, but I know I..."

There was a lengthy pause where Tony let his hand fall, looking the god directly in the eye.

"Love me?"

Loki's anger slipped away, a small, painful sob escaping him.

Tony's resolution snapped in a second, his arms already wrapping around the god before Loki could do anything more.

Nothing else was said. Nothing else needed saying. So they held each other a little tighter and let the silence do the talking.

It was well into the afternoon before they said another word to each other. Between their argument and then, Loki kept touching him as if to be sure he was real.

Tony thought he would be doing it, seeing as he was the one living with mad hallucinations the past year or so. But every time Loki touched him, he proved himself to Tony that he was just as real. No one but his Loki felt like that. Only the real Loki touched him like he meant something, not because he was useful.

"How long?" Loki asked in a whisper, pressing his forehead against Tony's. It was the first words either of them had uttered in a while, and it took Tony slightly by surprise.

"I... I lost count," he replied after some time, trying to relax his body.

They had collapsed ungracefully to the floor, Loki clinging to him like a raft in the ocean. The god cried, and cried, and cried while he held him close. Tony had whispered words to him to calm him, and at some point he lost track of what he was even saying.

Tony never wanted to hear such sounds from Loki again. It was by far, one of the most painful experiences in his life. And that was saying something, considering.

Plucking up what little courage Tony had left, he pulled out the battered old note pad from his back pocket. It was small and dirty, held together now with only a string. He had written in it, at first, every week. Then it became every two weeks, then every month. Then he stopped because it really didn't matter anymore. Because no one was coming for him, were they?

He leaned back in Loki's arms and flipped through some pages, trying to avoid showing the god what he had written. Loki stopped him and pulled the notebook from his hands.

"Hey!" Tony grunted, making a desperate grab for it. "Don't read all that shit."

"I need to," Loki replied firmly. "I've been without you all this time. I need to *know* you again."

Tony frowned and watched his lover's face flicker through a wide range of emotions as he went through the notebook. In each of Loki's expressions, he could read which page the god was on.

"Today is actually a little warm, think I might try to crawl to the top on the cliff and throw rocks off of it. Got nothing better to do."

A small smile.

"I called out to Heimdall again. I should stop before I lose my voice."

A small frown.

"He keeps talking to me while he thinks I'm asleep. Fucking moron has no concept of subliminal messages."

A hint of anger.

"How can I kill myself and make sure it's a speedy death?"

This was the page that captured Loki's attention the most, and he knew it. Tony watched as the god froze, his face growing impossibly calm. He nearly smiled at his lover's attempt at self control when Loki's hands were obviously shaking.

"Jumping off the cliff is not final enough. I would just end up with a few more broken bones. I've got nothing sharp enough to really cut me open. Besides, I tried that last month with a scrap of armor and Batman did something to stop the blood. He also knocked me out for a day and gave me fucking nightmares as punishment. If I'm going to do it, I have to get away from this cave. I'm so tired. I'll figure it out tomorrow."

"Hnn."

Tony frowned at the sound, trying to discern what exactly it meant.

"Lokes?"

"It was no accident," he spoke quietly, his eyes remaining on the words in front of him. "Your fall from the cliff. You said it was an accident."

Tony swallowed the lump that had grown with each page the god flipped through. He knew it was coming, because even as he wrote it down, he knew someone would see it. That someone would most likely be Loki, and he knew what came after that.

"No," he replied carefully, feeling his tongue turn to lead, "it wasn't."

After some time, Loki managed to tear his eyes away from the paper. They were sad, but a little wistful.

"I suppose this is what you felt when I told you of my time with death."

"Probably. Do you feel like crap?"

"... yes."

"Then definitely."

"Why?" Loki asked, trying and failing to keep a steady voice.

Tony smiled at him and reached out, taking the notebook from his hands. "Everything," he said quietly, tossing the book to the side.

He ran his hands over Loki's slowly before intertwining their fingers together. "Because I was alone with my demons for so long, and nobody was coming for me."

"I was coming for you."

"I... I wasn't sure anymore. I honestly thought you would be there sooner," Tony said. At the pained look on his lover's face, he added quickly, "I don't say that to make you feel bad or anything. It was my own desperate expectations."

Loki looked down at their hands, his voice coming out dead and emotionless. "I was a fool. I knew you would have used a familiar path, but I did not think you had the strength to reach Jotunhiem."

"I had a little help," Tony offered sheepishly.

"I realize that now," Loki said softly. He took one of his fingers and began to trace the lines on the back of Tony's hand. "Heimdall spoke as if it was the most obvious of things."

Tony swore the colors of the rainbow, startling Loki out of his funk.

"I, what?" Loki asked, a faint smile on his lips.

"You heard me. And there's more where that came from for that bastard."

"He does regret his actions, or lack thereof."

"I don't give a fuck," Tony snapped, turning away. He felt the prickle of tears form in the back of his throat. It had been months since he last cried.

"I screamed for him some of those nights," he added in barely a whisper.

Loki tilted his face up, his thumb brushing against his cheek so gently, Tony was sure he imagined it.

"I came for you," he said, meeting Tony's eyes firmly. "I would do it again and again if need be."

Tony's smile died half way through forming. Something inside him let go. The angry beast went to sleep again, leaving him with nothing but an empty cave. He didn't even realize he was crying

before he heard his own choked voice say, "We promised, didn't we..."

"Promised what?" Loki asked, pulling Tony closer to him and brushing his tears away.

"We promised that we wouldn't go where we could not reach one another."

Loki's smile was filled with pain as he leaned forward and kissed Tony's forehead gently.

"I will always come for you, no matter how far you roam."

"You seem to be in the habit of saving me," Tony joked, his tears still falling freely.

"You have done your equal part in saving me, Tony."

Tony looked at him and tried to smile. "Are we gonna be okay?"

"Yes," Loki said with more confidence than either of them felt.

"We are going to be okay."

Miles Before I Sleep

Chapter Summary

Some things require delicacy. Others require a slightly... rougher approach.

Chapter Notes

My apologies for this chapter. I feel like this story is just not coming together anymore. I mean, I know where I want to go... I have my plot. But my writing has been growing steadily worse.

-Unedited.

The next time Tony woke up, he felt like a run-over sloth. Every movement was slow, dragging, and hurt like hell. Considering where he had been sleeping for the past year, it wasn't all that bad. While his eyes started to focus on his surroundings, Tony's mind went through the mental checklist he had created back in the cave.

Where am I? Home.

Who else is here? Loki. Probably some sulky Avengers.

Am I awake or dreaming? No idea.

Do I care anymore? Not really.

He smiled bitterly to himself before laying eyes on the sleeping figure nestled in next to him. The sight of Loki was no longer something he flinched at. Tony allowed himself a small amount of rejoicing for being able to feel something again. Something more positive. Less suicidal.

Loki had thoroughly passed out, the months of sleepless nights finally catching up with him around 8 o'clock the previous night. They just barely managed to crawl back into the bed before both of them fell asleep without another word. Now, the god was tucked into Tony's blankets with his hair a curly mess, still wearing his grimy tunic. Tony spared a glance at his own clothes, realizing he had never removed what was left of his patched up outfit. He really did smell like shit. Delicate sensibilities of not.

Turning his attention back to the dishevelled god, he watched carefully for the rise and fall of the Loki's chest. It was something he had attempted to do when his dream Loki came to him. He never could tell if the fake breathed or not. He was a little distracted by the fire burning off his skin, or the nasty smile on Loki's face when he dug the knife in deeper.

The real Loki, he felt so different. How the hell could he have forgotten all those little things that the hallucinations left out? How did he not notice the way Loki's spicy smell was missing, or how gentle and slim his fingers were? More importantly, how did he ever doubt Loki, after everything the god had done for him?

The darkness had thought of him as tool, and treated him as such. If the tool was a little roughed up, it was fine. If the tool broke, just fix it.

If Loki really had been under that asshole's control, Tony seriously doubted the god would have offered to go on the epic donut quest for him. Or let Tony yell at him about things. Or do that thing with his tongue...

So, maybe they got pushed into the relationship a little, but every memory he had with Loki was his own. Even if the evil bastard seemed to have been spying on them from somewhere.

Tony's stomach suddenly roared to life with the mighty call of the hungry. He winced, hoping to avoid waking Loki up before he was fully rested. It seemed he didn't need to worry, because the god didn't stir an inch.

As tempted as he was to just lay there and watch Loki sleep, he hadn't eaten for a while before his rescue. Carefully removing himself from the tangle of Loki's limbs, Tony slid out of the bed with more grace than he thought possible. Unfortunately, an old pain shot up through his leg directly into his spine, reminding him that things were not back to normal. No, not even close to normal, if the tremors were anything to go by. He silently cursed his leg before limping down the hall to find the closest place with food.

It felt so wrong to him for his own tower to feel so unfamiliar. Tony knew each corridor like the back of his hand, yet he second guessed himself a dozen times and ended up lost. It took a lot longer than his stomach liked, but eventually he made it to the largest of the three kitchens. The smaller kitchenette in his suit was oddly devoid of foodstuffs. He had a feeling no one came up here while he was gone. It made him a little sick to think of Loki up there all alone, night after night after night.

Surprisingly enough, no one seemed to be around in the common room or the kitchen. Tony let out a guilty sigh of relief. He was not ready to confront his demons just yet. Not, at least, until he had some food in him.

His brain was screaming at him to go over his checklist. It was too weird that there wasn't even anyone in the living room. There should be at least one person lurking around, making lunch or something.

Where am I? Kitchen

Who else is here? Nobody.

Am I awake or dreaming? No idea.

Do I care anymore? Let's not go there.

Tony rolled his eyes at how useless his checklist was and glanced at the clock. He let out a laugh. It was five in the morning. Not as late as he thought and clearly way too early for Earth's mightiest heroes.

Tony chuckled at his own messed-up sleep schedule and limped over to the fridge, opening it to lean heavily on the door.

Well now, someone's been keeping this refrigerator well stocked.

Natasha has really taken over with all those weird looking meats.

Just as he reached for a box of what looked like shawarma take-out, a voice came from behind him.

"I wouldn't eat that if I were you. It's been in there for a few weeks."

Tony went completely still. It took all of his will power to not lash out with the fierce wave of magic that exploded to life inside of him. He felt it burn and claw at his insides to get out.

"You don't say," he managed sound cheerful, before turning to face a freshly awake Steve.

"I think Clint may or may not be making it into a biological weapon." Steve sighed and leaned against the door with an almost proud, fatherly look. "That, or Bruce and him are working together to create a new species."

Tony snorted and closed the refrigerator door, leaning back against it for support. "I see you grew a sense of humour while I was gone. Learn any other new tricks?"

"I'm glad to see you haven't lost your witty banter."

Tony let an easy grin slip on to his face. Internally, he was freaking right the fuck out. It wasn't fair that the Captain, of all people, had to be the one he ran into. It wasn't fair because his copy had been particularly harsh on him back in the cave. It was also not fair because Steve was a good man, and Tony knew that. But there was nothing more terrifying than a good man turned tormentor.

"Yeah, well... you can't change everything about me," he said with a fake laugh. He was already scooting his way around the other side of the breakfast island. "If the shawarma is growing eyes, I think I'll just head back to bed."

Steve blinked, looked at the clock, and looked back at Tony in surprise. "How are you even awake?"

Tony widened his grin and backed out of the kitchen. "Some things change."

"Tony..." Steve began, noticing him backing into the hall. He reached out a hand, a frown settling over his features. "Why are you—"

"I'm just tired. I'll see you later," Tony said in a rush, limping off down the hall in what he hoped wasn't too obviously a retreat. He was half way around the corner when he heard a sad, "*Okay*."

Loki woke up to a cold bed, something he had grown to expect over the past few months. The ache for Tony's warmth that soon followed was also a familiar enemy. When he finally remembered that, in fact, Stark was supposed to be in his bed, he jerked up and twisted around in a panic.

"Anthony?!"

There was a loud snapping sound from somewhere out of sight, and the room flashed with a blue

light.

"I said don't," came Tony's voice.

At his words, Loki remembered his promise not to use Stark's full first name. With that, came a wave of guilt at breaking such an important promise. He turned and launched himself out of bed in one fluid movement, finally laying eyes on his lover. Stark was curled up, impossibly small, and pressed firmly in the corner of the room. If the entire thing wasn't so strange, Loki would have spent more time wondering how he managed to wedge himself between the wall and the dresser. But those dark, haunted eyes pushed all unnecessary thoughts out of Loki's mind.

"My apologies, it is still a habit..."

And it was. Anthony had been the name on his lips every night as he woke screaming. The name he muttered under his breath, almost a prayer. Anthony, his mantra. Anthony, his hope.

"I will never say it again, if you so wish."

Tony shook his head once, but didn't say which he would prefer. So Loki stood still, carefully sending a thought to his lover.

"*May I move closer?*" he asked through the mind link, attempting once more to establish that connection he so desperately missed. The Mind Link that he had needed so badly when Tony was gone. It caused his body to shake with the effort to connect again.

Tony flinched, another small spark of light coming to life in front of him. Loki waited for a response, his heart growing heavy when he received none.

"You... you don't want to go digging around in there," Tony said quietly. "Not yet anyway," he added in a whisper.

Loki nodded, attempting to appear calm for Tony. There was no reason to stress Stark out anymore than necessary. The man had, after all, shoved himself into a tiny space and was letting out bursts of magic. That was not a sign of a healthy mind, Loki would know. It was so unlike his Anthony that he wasn't even sure how to handle it.

"May I come closer, still?"

"Fine."

Loki shifted closer before kneeling in front of Stark, forcing his shaking hands to still. "Why are you over here?" he asked tentatively.

Tony looked as if he'd rather die than answer that. After some time and apparently some internal struggle, he did. "I met Steve..."

Loki waited, hoping that wasn't all he was going to get for an answer. He knew Tony was still paranoid about the rest of the Avengers, but there had to be more than that.

No, not paranoid.

Anthony was terrified of them.

Terrified of me.

"He was just suddenly there, behind me," Tony continued at last, his wide eyes carefully assessing Loki. "I nearly blew his head off, and then I just couldn't stand being near him."

"I understand."

"No, Loki... you *don't*."

A sudden pain crawled its way from Loki's chest, creeping across his bones like flame on oil. Loki clutched at his chest unconsciously, and looked away from those dark eyes. Her nearly jerked back when a hand found his only seconds later, feeling unnaturally warm.

"What's wrong, Loki?"

Loki let out a breath. He hadn't expected Stark to come closer, even after their talk last night.

"It's," he gasped and cleared his throat to try again. "It's nothing to worry about."

"You're doing such a good job at convincing me, all that panting in pain really fooled me."

Loki shot him a glare, but Tony only scoffed at him, pressing his hand to Loki's chest more firmly. The pain slid away, leaving Loki feeling slightly bruised all over. The warmth from Tony's hand seeped into him, and *Skjöldur Óðins*, Loki didn't want to admit how good it felt. He couldn't say a word of it, not to his damaged Tony. Who knew what could trigger a memory? A single word, as Loki had already found out, was enough to tip the fragile balance in Stark's mind.

"It's me, isn't it?" Tony asked, leaning his forehead against Loki's shoulder. Instead of answering him, Loki curled his arms around Stark and pulled him closer.

They remained silent for a while, and it felt good. It wasn't the awkward silences of earlier last night, nor the heavy, tear ridden silence before they fell asleep. It was comforting and somewhat humbling to be back in one another's presence. Both of their minds on one track, at last.

"Did you know I was a weapon?"

Perhaps not the same track...

Loki's thoughts followed sluggishly, unsure what his lover was asking. Was it a metaphor, or was he being literal?

"Well, yes," Loki responded slowly.

The reaction was instantaneous. Tony jerked violently away, and made a choking sound at the same time. Loki cursed himself internally for misunderstanding the question.

"Tony..." Loki began again, treading carefully. "You fly around in a metal suit that shoots fire, among other things."

Stark's mouth fell open, a small

"Oh," escaping him.

"You mean something else entirely, don't you?"

"Yeah, something Batman said."

Loki furrowed his brow at the use of the oddly familiar name again. He just couldn't place it. He knew the creature had never told him his name, but Loki somehow doubted it was actually 'Batman'.

"Batman..."

Tony's fear slipped away and was replaced by a smile. A real smile.

"Yeah, I called him that to piss him off and it stuck. The Dark Knight, Batman, Power Ranger. The list goes on."

"Of course you did," Loki said with a smirk. It was good to hear that Tony had kept up his usual antics while he was trapped there. Perhaps there was some hope for normality.

"Anyway," Tony said, his tone once more growing serious, "I already explained the whole 'these two need to get together'." His lips drew together in a thin line. "Well, apparently that was to create a weapon. Me."

"I do not see how you are any more a weapon after we met, than you were before."

"Uh, well..." Tony paused, looking a little unsure of himself. "My magic didn't exist until you came along."

"It did, Tony. I simply helped it manifest itself." Loki tensed and added quickly, "Albeit, it wasn't my intention to do such a thing."

Tony nodded and looked down at their hands, looking slightly shocked. Loki glanced down and felt a smile tug at his lips. Somehow, they had unconsciously intertwined their fingers and were holding hands in a rather intimate fashion. Without a second thought, Loki drew Tony's hand up to his lips to give it a kiss.

Tony's eyes widened, but his body relaxed further than Loki had seen it since their return.

"You know how to placate me."

"Again, not my intention," Loki muttered between kissing each of his lover's raw knuckles. He brought up Tony's other hand and began again, showering kisses over his hand gently.

Tony let out a startled gasp when Loki's magic began to creep slowly from his lips and enter his body.

"Wait, Lokes..." He looked startled and a little more worried than necessary. "Are you sure you're up for this?"

"Shush, and let me heal you already," Loki muttered against Tony's wrist. He continued on up his arm, placing delicate kisses and releasing his magic.

As exhausted as he was, it felt good to release his magic into Tony again. It was something he had

never realized before, but something always returned to him when he shared with Tony. It was as though their magic responded to one another.

"Lokes..." Tony gasped quietly as Loki reached his neck.

"Problems?" Loki asked with a grin, dragging his teeth against Tony's skin gently.

Tony shuddered and made a mewling sound in response. Loki took that as a 'no' and released more of his magic.

He should probably feel more scared right now. Given the fact that Loki's magic was pumping through his body, and how close the god was to him. Shouldn't it be triggering his bad memories?

But Tony wasn't scared at all. Because this was the real Loki. Because only his Loki made him right, made him feel whole again.

"Loookiiiii," he heard himself whine.

Jesus, I sound like a thirteen year old losing his virginity.

But damn, that's what it felt like. There was no reason he should be feeling such a strong sense of euphoria from some kisses and a little magic.

Loki made an appreciative noise in return, and Tony realized the god was breathing just as heavily as he was.

"Why do you feel so good?" Tony found himself asking. He really wasn't in control of his mouth today. He blamed Loki's persuasive kisses.

"Why must you always," Loki nipped his collar bone, "chatter so much?"

Tony hissed, throwing his head back at the feeling. After his senses settled a little again, he let out a quiet laugh. "If I'm still talking, you're not doing your job."

Loki let out a huff of irritation and pulled Tony's face down. He was glaring at him. "I suppose I shall have to find a way to shut your mouth."

"I invite you to try."

Loki's grin was feral, and instead of frightening Tony as it probably should have, it excited him more.

Loki was clearly aware of the effect he was having on his body. Sliding his hands up, and releasing one more final burst of magic to heal him.

He needed his lover in perfect health for what he had planned for him.

Unexpectedly, Tony let out a moan as sparks of green flew over his skin. Loki tensed and drew his head back to look him over. "Are you alright, love? Did I hurt you?"

Tony's eyes fluttered closed before he let out a gasp. "Fuck no. That was the best thing I've felt in a long fucking time."

"Really?" Loki inquired, curiously. "Then I suppose I might as well stop where I was going. Since that was clearly the climax of your day."

Tony growled and pulled Loki's body against his roughly. "I don't think so."

"But you are quite... satisfied." Loki smirked, pressing his forehead against Stark's. Their breath mingled as he pressed even closer.

"I'm not satisfied until you're screaming my name."

Loki didn't know who moved first, but seconds later they had their tongues wrapped around one another's in a passionate kiss. Loki could not hold back the groan of satisfaction from feeling Tony's warm mouth against his. All the kisses since their return had been short, chaste even. But this kiss was almost enough to drive him over the edge. Almost.

"Loki..." Tony whispered as he pulled back from the kiss. "Loki..."

Loki's eyes met his, and he smiled nervously. "Yes?"

"Fuck me, now."

Loki made a noise that Tony had never heard before, and suddenly he was being lifted off the floor. He half expected the god to throw him onto the bed, but he was laid down carefully as if he were fragile.

*Maybe I am a little fragile.
But gentile isn't what I need right now.*

"Fuck my brains out, Lokes," he growled, pulling the god down to kiss his lips again. The kiss turned into a battle of biting and sucking, a game of domination. Loki was winning, and Tony loved it.

When the god pulled back, Tony didn't bother to hide his disappointment. He whimpered.

"Are you sure?" Loki asked, his voice barely a whisper.

Tony resisted the urge to start grinding into Loki. "I need this... I need *you*."

There was a snap of magic and their clothing was gone, exposing Tony's already rock hard member to the cold air. He shamelessly bucked up into Loki's groin and started to grind.

"That's it..." he panted, admiring the color that tinted Loki's cheeks.

Loki shushed him and leaned over his body slowly, once more sliding a single hand up Tony's chest. Tony flinched in surprise when Loki's fingers found his nipple and gave it an exploratory pinch. It caught him off guard enough for him to let out a much louder moan.

"If you continue this," Loki purred, "the Avengers are going to come see what horrible things I'm doing to you."

"You did say you would shut me up."

With a smug smile, Loki ran a finger down between Tony's round cheeks and traced his entrance slowly.

Tony growled and arched into the god's touch eagerly. "Don't waste time. I want you inside me."

Loki raised an eyebrow and teased the entrance still.

"It's been too fucking long, Lokes!"

He placed a thumb against the side and added some pressure around the rim. Tony squeaked in surprise.

"You're doing this on purpose..."

"Perhaps," Loki said with a wide grin.

Tony grumbled and stretched his arms up over his head, looking up at the god with his best come-hither look. It was an obvious challenge. One Tony knew Loki couldn't back down from.

"Oh," Loki purred, his voice growing low and husky, "you want to play that kind of a game."

Tony batted his eyelashes and licked his lips slowly. "Do I look to be in a gaming mood?"

Loki suddenly pressed in an already slick finger, sending a shock through Tony's body. He hadn't been expecting Loki to be so prepared already. Clearly the god was as eager as he was, wasting his magic on lube.

Blue, pulsating waves of magic began to radiate from him as he pressed into Loki's finger. He whimpered, and tried to catch his breath before he hurt Loki somehow.

But when he looked up, Loki was staring at him with hungry eyes, his mouth slightly open in surprise.

"Beautiful..."

That was just too much. Tony flung himself up and grabbed Loki's head, kissing him desperately. Loki hummed into his mouth and followed Tony back down to the bed.

The god was already lifting his hips when they broke apart for air.

Tony stared, panting, into the green eyes that waited patiently above him. It wasn't until he felt the tentative press of Loki's cock against his hole that he understood the questioning look in the god's yes.

"Please," he begged, reaching up and running a hand down Loki's cheek. That was all the permission he needed. Loki shifted his hips as he pushed into Tony's entrance with slow deliberation.

Tony hissed in pain. It had, after all, been a long time since he had Loki inside of him. After a long moment, Tony relaxed around him and let out a soft groan.

"Shit. Did you get bigger?" he asked.

Loki gave him an odd look, twisting his hips a little but otherwise remaining thrust fully into Tony.

"It has been far too long," he replied with a sad smile. "It's only natural that I be this... excited."

"Wait..." Tony blinked up at him. "You mean this whole time you didn't... Uh... Didn't do anything?"

"If by 'do anything' you mean pleasure myself, than no. I did not."

Tony felt his cheeks burn and his cock twitch at Loki's admittance.

He leaned up and pulled Loki in for another loving kiss. The god hummed once again against his lips and pulled his cock out slowly.

Jesus Christ he's big!

Loki shifted his head back, pulling on Tony's lower lip with his teeth. Just as he let go, he thrust his cock back in roughly.

Tony yelped as it pressed in deeply, digging his fingers into Loki's back. His grip relaxed a little as Loki pulled back out painfully slow.

"Fucking hell, Lokes," Tony grumbled, resting his head against the god's chest. "At this rate, i'm gonna cum way before you."

"I find it amusing that you can complain even as you are filled with me," Loki replied with a cheerful smile.

"Well maybe if you—"

A second later, Tony was pressed into the bed by the sheer force of Loki's thrusts. With each one, Loki pressed in deeper as Tony's muscles began to relax around his cock. Every breath came in shuddering gasps, and his hands had somehow found their way into Loki's hair. Their eyes met for a long moment when Loki had pulled back and paused. A flicker over the god's shoulder caught his attention, and he turned to look.

The air was sparkling around them with a mix of colors. There was a weird twisting swirl of teal hovering to one side, while the rest of the colors flickered in and out of existence. It was beautiful

and a little distracting.

"Tony," Loki grunted as he thrust harder with each word, "Look. At. *Me*."

Tony managed a sound between a gurgle and a whimper before tightening his grip on Loki's hair and dragging him closer. They locked eyes once more and Tony realized something was different this time.

It wasn't just the magic flying around them like some sort of personalized light show. Loki felt different to him, almost like a stranger. Tony nearly stopped Loki to figure out what was wrong. But as off-putting as it was, he was already so close to cumming. Plus, Loki had this desperately sad look in his eyes mixed in with the lust.

Tony blinked a few times as he felt Loki change position slightly and begin to thrust against his prostate. He began to babble, beg for more, and groan Loki's name. Then something clicked.

The connection. The Mind Link was completely closed between them. Both of them had put up walls, and they still weren't down. So Tony closed his eyes and turned his focus inward. He searched for that little bright spot that was always there like a pilot light.

There.

Now...

"Loki..."

Loki twitched and slowed his pace a little. "Tony?"

Tony opened his eyes and smiled slowly. "*Let me in.*"

For a second, Loki's eyes went wide and unsure. Tony half expected him to say, 'No, you aren't well enough yet' or some shit like that. But he didn't. Instead, the walls came down.

It was a shock, for both of them, when they connected again. Tony thought for sure his head was going to explode. To top it all off, Loki had suddenly grabbed Tony's cock and began pumping it in time with his thrusts. The thrusts that had grown more feverish since they connected.

Talk about sensory overload.

Tony was screaming something when he came, and he thought he heard Loki saying something as well. Everything went black for a while, or maybe it was only a few seconds. When he could see again, he was met with a pair of green eyes hovering over him. They looked fearful and concerned.

"I'm okay, Loki... I'm more than okay."

Loki mumbled something before slipping out of him gingerly. They were both shivering as the sweat already began to cool on their bodies. Tony stared up into space before Loki's eyes were above him again.

"I have never heard you scream my name like that before," Loki said quietly, his hand brushing down Tony's cheek. He was smiling shyly, almost like he didn't want to admit how much he liked

it.

"I did promise you, didn't I?"

With a chuckle, Loki slipped into the bed next to Tony. The hand returned, this time running his fingers through Tony's hair.

"Thank you."

Tony smiled and flopped his head to the side to gaze at his lover. "Thanks for what? You did all the work."

Loki stared at him while he continued to trail his hand through Tony's hair. He said nothing for a some time while he held Tony's gaze. Finally, he smiled.

"For letting me back in," he said quietly. "I felt as though I was dying, all these months you are gone. Then, you returned to me. But..."

"But I blocked you out," Tony added.

"I shied away as well. I was too weak to handle the... Images your mind was projecting."

"I... Sorry, Lokes."

"No," Loki said, shaking his head. He slid his hand down and cupped Tony's face gently. "I am sorry. I am so, so sorry for everything."

Tony hummed and snuggled closer, wrapping his arms around the god.

"How about this: neither of us are sorry for anything. We did exactly what we needed to do, and here we are." Tony grinned and was rewarded with a faint smile back. "Here we are, Lokes. A couple of handsome beasts who just had the best sex in the universe. We can think dirty thoughts to each other in some dusty old language, and we make a kick-ass fighting team. I mean, we're linked mind, body, and soul."

With a laugh, he added, "if anything, people should be jealous of us."

A bubble of laughter burst out of the god, and It had been way too fucking long since he had heard it. His Loki's laugh.

Tony marked this as his new favorite moment in his life.

The next time Tony woke up, he felt like a different person. Everything felt fresh, new, and a little too shiny. Tony decided it was due to his sex-high and stared at the ceiling, going once more over his checklist.

Were am I? Home.

Who else is here? My Loki

Am I awake or dreaming?

Definitely awake.

Nick Fury Has Another Bad Day

Chapter Summary

Director Fury was in his office when Doctor Doom went missing, again. Even if Fury had a hunch on who took him, he didn't want to go down that road again. Tony Stark was becoming a real menace, and it was high time SHIELD did something about him and Loki.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait, and heads up to everyone: There is some smut in this chapter.

Unedited, for the most part.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Director Fury was in his office when Doctor Doom went missing, again. This time, they checked heat signatures, air currents, and even led a team with a dog into the cell to be sure he was really gone. All of this took far too much time, and ended with the same result. Doom was still gone. Even if Fury had a hunch on who took him, he didn't want to go down that road again.

"Sir, we could appeal to Ms. Romanoff or agent Barton perhaps?"

Fury eyed the agent through the gaps of his fingers. A headache was already growing after the first announcement. The charade they had to preform to be sure the man was actually gone had only helped it along.

"If I could appeal to those two, they would have stayed with SHIELD in the first place," he snapped back, "they made their choice back then. Even if it was the *stupid* choice."

"Then what do you suggest we do, sir?" Agent Hill asked. "The last effort to contact them went less than favorable."

Fury shot her a look for stating the obvious and glared back down at the note on his desk. The note had appeared about a month after his team broke off and sided with Loki. It wasn't something the leaders would agree on, hell, it wasn't something he would usually agree on. But something had to be done, and if HYDRA was willing to bring Loki down, then so be it.

"Call this number, say 'yes', listen to their instructions, then bring me agent Ward." Fury continued

to stare at the paper. "We need someone to appeal to Tony Stark this time."

Several hours later, Fury entered an abandoned office building in Detroit. Considering the number of abandoned buildings and the lack of surveillance, Detroit was the perfect place to hold secret meetings. The current leader of HYRDA did not come out personally to meet him, and he wasn't all that surprised. Fury was surprised when a young red headed woman showed up at the meeting place completely alone and proceeded to order him around.

"I want to be perfectly clear, we are not 'teaming up', nor are we reaching some sort of peace treaty here," the woman said as an introduction. "We are aiming for the same enemy, and our resources will be put to better use when pooled together."

Fury gave a quick nod in agreement and opened his mouth to respond.

The woman continued on, clearly not needing his input, "HYRDA will do the dirty work for you, if you give us the means to execute the task." She paused and handed over a red file folder. "We never were able to crack Stark's codes for either his private homes or his tower. This is also where your agents would come in. We are aware you know your way into his system."

"We *did* know a way in, but that was before the last incident," Fury said, the vein in his forehead throbbing at the memory. "Things will have changed since then. Stark is no idiot, if he hasn't upgraded his system, he's either gone insane or he's under Loki's mind control."

The redhead gave him an odd look. "You say that as though mind control is completely out of the question."

Fury opened the file folder and flicked through the lists of their demands. It was reasonable. Reasonable was worrying with HYRDA. It usually meant that they were more likely to make a secondary move to obtain what they wanted. "From what I've seen, Stark doesn't need mind control to bend over for Loki, trust me."

The woman seemed amused at this for a moment before she switched back into business mode. "Why the sudden interest in Loki again? You seemed to be more than willing to let sleeping dogs lie."

Fury looked over the list once more and looked up at her again with a slight smile. "If the dog was sleeping, it wouldn't be a problem. This dog needs to be put down."

There was a slight hint of a frown on the woman's lips before they curled into an unnaturally wide smirk. "Then let us be the ones to put him in his place."

No one had been able to get Stark out of the bedroom, not even Loki. Tony had managed to make it into the hall once before spotting Thor and scuttling right back into the room again. For some reason, Loki also couldn't get Stark to part with his disgusting clothing. Clearly, there was something really wrong with the man, who would typically throw a shirt away and buy a new one

if there was a stain. Except, of course, for the band shirts that he either treasured so much he barely wore them, or didn't care and ended up with massive stains all over them.

"You *have* to take a shower, you *have* to change your clothes, and you *have* to get out of this bölvaðir room!" Loki nearly shouted. The expanse of the argument so far had already reached the ears of everyone in the tower, but neither of them particularly cared anymore. It wasn't anything new to them.

"Don't think you can get away with yelling at me in your old tongue," Tony replied from somewhere in the depths of his closet. He had taken residence there after seeing Thor, and Loki had yet to be able to find him amongst the twenty something racks, shelves, and boxes of clothes.

"Af Alföðr og öllum börnum hans..." Loki began, approaching yet another bunch of clothing to search for Stark, "if you do not cease this childish behavior, I will burn everything in here."

Silence was his answer. Loki muttered another curse under his breath and dug through more suits. He jumped as cold arms wrapped themselves around him from behind. He sighed and leaned back into Tony's body, resting his hands on the scared ones crossing his stomach.

"I knew threatening your clothing was the only way to smoke you out," he remarked playfully.

Tony laughed humorlessly. "That wasn't why I came out, not that you would believe me."

"Tell me then," Loki replied, turning around to face the shorter man, keeping Tony's arms around him. "Why did you come out?"

"I got cold."

"I noticed... that has been happening a lot since your return," Loki said with a frown. He pressed his forehead against Tony's. The mortal's temperature must have been very low for his body to feel cold to Loki. The worry that had been eating at the back of his mind started to grow once again.

"I just feel sapped of energy," Tony replied, nuzzling his face against Loki's cheeks.

Loki smiled despite the waves on concern. The feeling of Tony's scratchy beard against his skin felt oddly good. It was alarming how much one missed even the smallest of things once someone was gone.

"Love, please take those clothes off, and come shower with me."

Tony smiled languidly for a moment before growing stiff and awkward again. Loki sighed with impatience. "What is it that bothers you so? I don't have to shower with you, if it makes you uncomfortable."

Tony snapped his head back and gave him a look Loki couldn't quite understand. It seemed as though Tony didn't trust him again.

"I want you to know something first," Tony began, his voice tight and nervous. "When we... last time we slept together, it was dark."

Loki raised an eyebrow and waited for him to continue. Stark seemed to be struggling to find

words again. Something else that was new since his return.

"You didn't see my body," Tony continued in a soft voice, "it's not the same anymore."

"I healed you, Tony. You should be fine."

"You can heal up current stuff nice and perfect, but I've got ones from before we came back that the magic didn't touch."

Loki felt something crackle over their connection. He waited, translating the sensation into words. It felt like fear, an old fear that Stark had been holding into since he...

Since he jumped off the cliff.

He stood there, arms around his chilly lover, and tried to think of the right words the eloquently express his feelings without hurting Tony.

"I don't care."

Tony blinked at him, eyes widening a fraction of an inch.

"Excuse me?"

"I don't *care* about your scars," Loki repeated, his hands reaching up to pinch Tony's cheeks. "I love you no matter what you've done and what you look like. Do you truly think someone who believed he was a monster for such a long time, would find fault in a few lines across your skin?"

A bark of laughter exploded into the room, startling Loki. He honestly could not remember the last time he had heard Stark laugh so loudly. It was so foreign to him that it hurt a little as his heart fluttered with happiness.

"Well then, I think I've been thoroughly Silver-Tongued," Tony said with another chuckle. "I'll give in, for now."

"No 'for now'. You shall give in to me forever."

A mild blush crept over Tony's face at his words. "I think," he muttered, pressing closer to Loki's body, "that sounded like a proposal."

"It just may be," Loki whispered against his lover's lip, his eyes tracking Tony's own. There was a spark of excitement that grew brighter and brighter before they kissed. Then, Loki was too caught up in the sensation of Tony's tongue exploring his mouth to focus on his eyes anymore.

With a displeased grunt from Stark, Loki broke the kiss soon after.

"Shower."

"Yes, your *highness*," Tony replied with a smirk and a small salute.

When he turned away, some of the stiffness from before returned. Loki watched the muscles tense down Tony's back, his shoulders hunched up, and even his fingers curled into fists. This time, a wave of words came at him through the mind link.

He says he doesn't care but

He knows where they came from.

I jumped.

He will hate me.

He hates me.

He will hit me.

No

That's not the real Loki.

I shouldn't have jumped.

I should have been

Stronger.

It had been a while since Tony had let his guard down enough for that to happen. Loki was conflicted, pleased that Tony felt safe enough to allow one of the walls to drop between them, and horrified that Tony still saw the images of Loki hurting him. Stark hadn't let Loki bring him back into the safe dream realm, opting instead to struggle through the night. Loki often woke to the raspy sounds of a silent scream, Tony's body ridged with imagined pain. All he could do, all he was allowed to do, was smooth the wrinkles between his brow and calm him with his touch. It worked, slowly, but eventually Stark managed to find a more peaceful sleep.

The shower had been turned on while Loki was lost in his thoughts. He heard a shuffle of clothing and a head peaked out from the bathroom door.

"You coming or do I have to drag you in here myself?"

Loki slid his shirt over his head, eyeing Tony to gauge his reaction. He was pleased to see Stark's eyes grow wide and hungry, looking up and down Loki's body with full appreciation. He held back a shiver of excitement. It was ridiculous, the power this man had over him. That pair of brown eyes upon him was all it took to excite him. He decided to return the favor, and slid his black jeans down slowly. If Tony wanted a show, he would get one.

As he kicked off the jeans he heard a shuddering breath and a whisper, " you *tease*..."

With a smirk, Loki unfurled himself to stand at his full height, one hand resting on his hip while a finger toyed with the edge of his borrowed boxers. They were, of course, red and gold. Tony seemed to like it when Loki wore his stuff, so he had taken a habit of sneaking his boxers in particular.

"Whatever do you mean, love?" Loki asked in a low purr. He waited, still half way across the room.

"You know damn well what I mean," Tony replied breathlessly, "Or do I have to show you?"

Loki tilted his head as if he could not fathom what Stark meant, his fingers tugging on the waist band of the boxers playfully. With a huff, Tony came out from behind the bathroom door to show him, exactly, how his teasing had effected him. Loki licked his lips, the temptation to kneel before his lover overwhelming.

With a small chuckle, Loki slipped down the boxers and stepped out of them, moving closer at last to the bathroom door where Stark stood. Tony's eyes wandered over him once more, slowly and meticulously taking in every inch of Loki's body. He had seen the man look at his work like that, making connections and mental notes. This time, he almost seemed to be planning the best route to

follow along Loki's body with his tongue.

As he moved closer, Loki spotted the first scar. He froze. It wasn't what he had expected at all.

"Is that... from the fall?" He asked before he could stop himself. He sent a silent curse to the heavens for speaking without thinking.

But Tony smiled and looked down at the scar half way down his abdomen. It was about the size of Tony's hand, barely covered as he slid his fingers over the torn skin. It was shaped almost like a star, cracks radiating out from the still red, puckered skin. It had been a deep puncture wound in its time.

"Yeah," Stark said at last, "I sort of landed on some ice. It goes all the way through." He turned and showed an even larger star on his back. Instead of clean lines crawling from the center, his entire back was speckled with small puncture wounds. It was as though he had landed on a bed of small spikes.

Pain welled up in Loki, so strong he stumbled forward and had to rest his head against Tony's scarred back to catch his breath. He realized that he was overwhelming Stark with the emotional outburst, and tried to close off the link.

"Stop," Tony warned in a hushed voice. "It's fine. You don't need to cut me out."

Loki shook his head, unable to bring himself to speak. His fingers traced each scar as hot tears threatened to fall.

He had not known. He should have known, by now, how fragile mortals were. Yes, Stark had survived so many battles, so many falls beforehand. But he was always left with scars. A hole in his chest, millions of small cuts on those strong hands, and now a constellation of stars scattered across his back.

Loki knelt, then, and kissed the mark that was the largest. The sun amongst them all.

Tony's body shivered under his lips and he stayed there for a moment, wishing that maybe, just maybe, his magic could heal it. When no spark came, he stood and turned Stark around to face him.

"You amaze me," Loki said quietly.

Tony stared at him for a long moment, surprise slowly giving way to something softer. "Right back at you, babe."

"Shower?"

Tony grinned, the mischievous spark returning to his eyes. "Promise to help me get clean?"

Loki tilted his chin up with a finger and kissed him deeply. Tony answered with a moan and pushed him backwards through the bathroom door and into the steam filled room. They nearly fell into the shower stall, each too wrapped up in the other to care if they shut the door or not. Tony's low moans grew louder as Loki trailed kisses down his jaw, neck, and to his chest. The hot water

seemed to help with the chill Tony had been suffering, that or Loki's touch was enough to warm him.

They shivered together in excitement, eyes closing as their bodies slid together in perfect harmony. Loki's fingers danced over his skin, tracing the reactor, a scar, the line of his hip bone. He grinned at the mortal, wide and predatory, no longer afraid of scaring him with his desires. Tony growled back just as wild, his fingers slipping through his wet hair as he pulled Loki up for another kiss.

"Ég þarf að vera lokið."

Tony chuckled faintly, his breath catching in his throat as Loki's fingers found their way downwards. "You make me feel whole," he replied, meeting Loki's eyes.

With a snarl, Loki lifted him from the floor, pressing Tony's body against the wall. The desperate need they had when they fell together just days ago had not been slaked. It burned in him just as strongly, and Loki was glad that Tony felt it as well. Through the mind link, something connected before their bodies even did so.

"L-Loki?!" Tony gasped, surprised and pleased at the same time.

Loki was beyond words. He slipped another teasing finger into his lover and whimpered at the pleasure that thrummed over the connection. He could feel his own desire, and Tony's at the same time. It was nearly overwhelming.

"Do you feel... me?" He asked tentatively, afraid that he was the only one so deeply connected.

Tony's eyes were wide and staring at nothing, a high whine escaping his lips. He shuddered roughly before managing to whisper, "I feel you, oh god I *feel* you."

Loki hissed, no longer able to hold back. He lifted Tony's legs up, hooking them over his arms as he aligned himself with his lover's entrance. For a moment, everything went still, the rushing water silent, the soft echo of their panting breaths seemed to cease.

It was just them, and them alone. Lost so deeply in the connection between them the world ceased to exist. It returned, suddenly, with Loki's careful thrust into him. Sound exploded into existence once more with a loud cry from Tony.

Loki cried out as well, dazed from feeling what Tony felt on top of his own ecstasy. It was madness. It was too good.

With a shuddering breath, Loki drew out one final time before he began to thrust up into Tony, pressing him hard against the wall. Their bodies fit together as perfectly as their minds had connected and with a low growl, Loki shifted his hips to drive into Tony deeper.

"Ohfuckohfuckohfuuuck," Tony chanted, his eyes squeezed tightly closed against both the water and the intense rapture.

The link wavered, as if alive, and snapped taught like a line catching a fish. The ecstasy drove them both to coming faster than ever before. Tony screamed, and Loki answered with his own. Loki's eyes burned with the lights of stars.

No, the sun.

And then it was quiet again. Warm, comfortable silence that enveloped them so suddenly they both slid to the tiled floor. Once pulled apart, Tony curled himself up against him, still panting heavily.

"What, in the entire fucking universe, was *that*?" He asked, pressing his face into Loki's wet hair.

"I can only make an educated guess, seeing as I have never had any other who I could call my soul mate."

Tony chuckled and wrapped his arms around him. "I'm assuming it's a Mind Link thing, then?"

"I would assume so."

"Why has it never done that before?"

Loki thought about it, his hand rubbing lazy circles across Tony's shoulder blades. It did seem rather sudden, this intensified connection. What had changed so drastically in the past day or so? Was it his acceptance of Tony's body? That didn't seem worthy enough to warrant this. Perhaps it was simply how the bond reconnected after a separation?

*Then why was it this time, and not the last time we made love?
Was it even something I did?*

Loki stiffened when he realized what it might be. It seemed so small, not noteworthy at all. But perhaps the bond knew, better than him, that he had truly meant it.

"My proposal," he spoke at last, tilting Stark's head up to look him in the eye. "I meant it."

His brown eyes widened, blinking away at the water droplets. "When you said forever? That really was a proposal?"

Loki nodded, a faint smile starting to form. "I may not have been conscious of it at the time, but clearly the link knew."

Tony was silent for a long while, just staring at him as if he expected Loki to tell him it was all a joke.

"Does this mean... I can try my hand at the trials?" He asked at last, the brightness returning to his eyes.

"I wish you did not need to do them at all. But yes," Loki sighed, "forever with you means the golden apple. Therefore, the trials."

"I'll do it," Tony said firmly.

Happiness, unlike any he had felt in a long time, washed over Loki. He cupped Stark's face between his hands and showered him with kisses. Tony laughed, kissing back when he had the chance, but mostly allowing Loki his moment of child-like glee.

After they managed to stand again, they lathered up with soap and rinsed off quickly. Tony stepped out first and started drying his hair, no longer ashamed of his scarred body. Loki smiled to himself and came up behind him, reaching his arms around Tony to place his hands on his chest.

His fingers brushed the arc reactor and he whispered softly against Tony's neck, "I love you, my Golden Star."

Fury jumped when the door opened several seconds after speaking into the intercom. Any other day, and he would have had better self control. Today, he had dealt with enough freaky shit and the Avengers actually letting him into the tower was now at the top of his list.

"Come in. We're in the first floor meeting room."

Fury frowned at Natasha's monotone voice. Damn them. They knew choosing her would lead him in blind. No vocal inflections or key words that would tip him off about the mood of the room he was about to walk into.

Flanked by several agents, he left the rest in the lobby as he entered the conference room. A long table was set up in the center, at least twenty chairs reaching all the way around. Three chairs were filled on the other side of the table. Of course, Tony Stark sat at the head. Loki was standing slightly behind him, a hand firmly on his shoulder. To his side, sat Thor and Natasha.

Fury wondered why, of all people, Stark had chosen them to be his wingmen. Rogers and Banner both stood behind Loki, and Barton was leaning against the window looking for all the world like he was bored. Which, Fury knew, he wasn't.

"I guess I should thank you for letting me in this time without so much trouble."

Stark smiled a shark-like grin and replied smoothly, "Oh, we wanted to set something up as good as last time, but I'm afraid we ran out of time. I'm sure we can get a few cardboard cut outs in here, if it makes you feel better."

"Cut the *shit*, Stark," Fury snapped, "You know why I'm here."

The man was silent for a minute, and then Fury noticed how off Stark looked. He was sitting straight up, as tense as Clint's bow string. There was a new set of scars across his hands and a few on his cheeks. There was something else too, a hint of age that he didn't have before. The only thing more unnerving than that, was the way his left eye twitched any time Natasha or Thor moved an inch.

"You are here because, once again, something went wrong for you, and you think we did it." Tony smiled again, clearly forced. "You really need to learn to take responsibility for your own shit, Director."

Fury's frown deepened. No usual quip? No random stupid nickname? Was Stark really so off his game that he didn't take the chance to insult him? Something was really off about this whole situation.

"Why don't you stop hiding behind the rest of your team, and tell me where Doctor Doom is?"

Loki's hand squeezed Stark's shoulder slowly. The tension that had been building up seemed to listen slightly before he spoke.

"You really think I want anything to do with that hack?" Tony asked incredulously. "I do recall the last time you thought he was missing, you came barging into my tower all armed and dangerous and to find out he hadn't even left. Did you check the corner of his cell? I've heard he likes to talk to the rats."

Fury felt the familiar pulse of the vein in his forehead. There was some of that typical Stark. "This time, we made fucking sure he wasn't in there. The helicarrier does *not* have rats."

Tony smirked and leaned back into Loki, relaxing a bit more. "I assume you have removed all your agents from the carrier, then?"

"Har de fucking har," Fury growled, stepping closer to the table. "I'll ask you one more god damn time. Where is Doctor Doom?"

"Asking it again doesn't change the fact that I don't know, and don't care. Are we done here?"

"I'm done here," Fury agreed with a nasty smile. "But someone else isn't."

He got a raised eyebrow in response. Stark was clearly not impressed. Well wasn't he in for a surprise.

"Agent Hill, please send him in," he spoke into the com link.

"Sending him in now, Sir."

"Who is it?" Tony asked with a sneer. "What surprise guest did you bring me today?"

"Hello Tony."

Loki visibly twitched from behind Stark, his hand clenching down on the shoulder.

"Phill," was all Fury heard before the windows exploded inward.

"LOKI!" Fury shouted over the wail of wind and glass swirling around the room. The avengers had all ducked under the table the second the explosion hit, all but Loki and Stark. Tony was sitting in the same spot, his face contorted in rage, eyes glowing with an unnatural light. Loki had wrapped his arms firmly around him and seemed to be whispering something into his ear.

"LOKI! STOP THIS OR I *WILL* SHOOT YOU!" Fury called out again, gun aimed directly at the god's head. So what if it was pressed against Stark's neck. He wasn't so willing to protect the billionaire anymore. The wind stilled, thousands of pieces of glass froze in the air in a rather menacing manner.

"This is not me," Loki replied, his voice hitched in an odd way.

"Bullshit it's not," Fury hissed "hate to break it to you, but you're the only magician here." After a beat, he added, "Unless, of course, Doctor Doom *is* here after all."

Loki glanced at him, his expression clearly pained. "It is not either of us. Just... wait."

"I don't have time to wait, I've got a bunch of fucking glass aimed at me and my agent's bodies."

"*Wait*," Loki snarled, his head tipping back down to whisper into Stark's ear once more. Fury glanced over at his agents, concerned that some of them were on the floor.

"Coulson?"

"I'm here, sir," came his reply from behind a chair.

Every piece of glass inches closer suddenly. Fury jerked his attention back to the two across the table. Stark was shaking, and his eyes seemed to be a bright blue.

"I knew you were controlling him, you fucking freak," Fury said, his trigger finger tightening slightly.

"He is *not* being controlled," Loki hissed, sending his own glowing glare down the table at him. "This is his doing, and you brought it upon yourselves."

Fury blinked once, twice, three times. "Excuse me?"

Tony stood, so suddenly that Loki stumbled backwards. When he spoke, his voice was no longer human.

"*What* is that man doing, standing in my tower as if he's alive?"

Fury felt a shiver go through him.

"Agent Coulson has been deep undercover in another unit. Yeah, he did get badly wounded, but he didn't die."

Tony stepped around the edge of the table and started to advance on him. Fury adjusted his weapon from pointing at Loki, to pointing at him. His body knew, before his mind, that Stark was the most dangerous one in the room right now. He noted, uncomfortably, that Loki hung back, looking almost scared.

"You told us he *died*..."

"I had to, Stark. That's just how things worked," Fury replied, his voice faltering slightly. Coulson shifted at the edge of his vision, and peered out from behind the chair. Whenever he saw in Tony was enough to make him gasp.

"I nearly killed Loki because I thought he was *dead*," Tony said just as he reached the final stretch between him and the director. "I nearly let him kill me, because I believed that *he was dead*."

Fury stepped back, trying to put more distance between him and the man. His eyes were definitely glowing, and his voice sounded like he was speaking from the bottom of a well. Dark, cold, and a long ways away.

"This isn't the first time I didn't tell you everything, Stark," Fury tried in his usual tone. "You worked for me, last I checked. Before you ran off with your psycho god and took my agents with you."

"Yes," Stark said, finally stopping. "Yes, you've lied. You lied about the Tesseract, you lied about your deal with Loki, you lied about your weapons. You lie about everything, Fury." Tony paused, his head tilting forward slightly. "Those are nothing. Meaningless shit I could have found out in less than a second on my own. But this? You killed our friend for years and then you have the nerve to bring him back here as a *device* to get my attention."

His voice dropped another octave, becoming a course growl. "What gives you the *god damn right*?"

The glass inched closer, and Coulson made a small sound of discomfort. Fury looked away for a second, seeing a piece of glass pressed up against Coulson's neck. As soon as his eyes left Stark, something smashed itself into Fury's face, and the world went black.

Loki's face came between him and his prey.

Prey?

Jesus, what was this, the Discovery Channel?

Tony shook his head and swayed slightly. There was the sound of shattering glass and suddenly Loki was holding him.

"Loki?" He croaked, his throat feeling raw. Looking around the room, things began to resurface in his mind. "Where is he?"

Loki shook his head and kept his arms around him tightly. "They injected you with something from some sort of flying object. Just when you started trying to stab Fury with the glass I am afraid."

"It was a taser dart," Natasha said from where she was now leaned against the table. She brushed a few chunks of glass out of her hair and looked at Tony with dark, glassy eyes. "Fired by Coulson, I might add."

Tony stiffened, and all the glass in the room twitched. Loki's grip around him seemed to tighten and oddly enough, it was actually relaxing him.

"They took him back, Tony," came Clint's angry voice from behind him.

"So he didn't stay to make explanations, huh. I guess I shouldn't have held the knife to their throat, so to speak." Tony smiled bitterly and gently pushed Loki off of him so he could see his face. The god was paler than usual, and there were clear signs of fear running through his eyes.

Shit

I really scared him.

The question is, what part?

He felt Clint step closer to him and he nearly had a fit right there. He started shaking again, and turned his eyes away from Loki's to hide the fear.

"It's not your fault, buddy. I would have shot a lot more arrows if I wasn't hiding," Clint said, a hint of humor returning to his voice.

Tony twitched painfully when a hand landed on his shoulder. His eyes found Loki's again, and he pleaded silently for him to take him away.

Shit

Don't make me ask.

I can't....

"Lokes, please..."

Loki's eyebrows shot up in realization. Casting a quick glance between the two of them, he yanked Tony close and wrapped his arms back around him. Clint made a sputtering noise in protest.

"He cannot deal with close contact yet," Loki said quietly. The room went still suddenly, as if everyone finally remembered they were dealing with a broken Tony, not that usual semi-broken Tony.

"Sorry," Clint muttered as he backed away towards the rest of the group.

Tony couldn't do it anymore. The memories he had been pushing away, the ones he imagined throwing in the mental trash can, came back in full force. His legs gave out just as every one of his haunting avengers began to hurt him again. He whimpered as the echoes of pain washed out everything else, but his mind remembered to feel ashamed for showing weakness in front of the group.

"I have something I need to do," came Loki's voice from above him. It felt too far away, so Tony pressed into him harder.

"Tony?" Loki asked, directly into his mind. *"Do you think you can stay in the room while I take care of a few things?"*

"Where are you going?"

Loki pulled Tony's face from his chest and cupped his cheeks. *"I need to do something to help you. I swear shall return within the hour and I will tell you everything then."*

Tony let out a ragged sigh and nuzzled into the hands on his cheeks before muttering out loud, "I suppose I'll live. But I need to know why you were scared just now; before I let you go."

Loki smiled sadly before kissing his forehead, his voice reaching into his mind again.

"I was afraid, for a moment, that He had taken you from me again. I was afraid... Because I no longer have the strength to fight him if he is in your body."

Tony closed his eyes and shook his head a little. *"Why not? You did it before."*

"I can no longer... I cannot bring myself to harm your body, even if he is in control."

Tony's eyes snapped open. "You're gonna be one if those uber protective hubbies, aren't you?" He asked with a weak grin.

Loki stared at him blankly. "I am protective of you, I do not think I am this 'uber hubbies' thing of which you speak."

"Hmm, no, not *yet* you aren't." Tony arched his eyebrows and gave him a look that should have implied what he meant. It seemed it didn't, as Loki continued to blink at him in confusion. "I mean..." His voice lowered, " husband. You know, tied together forever?"

Loki's pupils blew out wide in surprise and a definite blush crept up his neck to his cheeks. It was adorable, especially the way he smiled suddenly and let out a cheerful giggle.

"Ah! Yes, I see," he said happily. "I shall, indeed, be your uber protective hubbies."

"What was that?" Bruce asked from somewhere in a corner.

"Nothing, nothing," Tony answered with a shrug, feeling more comfortable in the room with them than he had since before he left. Loki was a powerful relaxation drug, apparently.

"I heard 'hubbies'," Natasha joined in, " is there something you want to share with the class, Stark?"

Tony turned and stuck out his tongue, making an overly long, loud raspberry noise before turning back to Loki. The god was giving him a look that Tony hoped would cause their future children to cower in fear.

"I'll go take a nap, you go do your thing."

Loki grabbed his arm and cast one more look around the room. He sighed, waved a hand, and pulled Tony out of the room before the glass set into place once more.

"I'm sorry," Tony muttered as they reached the bedroom. Loki was already stripping his suit of his body with another swipe of his hand. Comfortable clothes were handed to him before Loki met his eyes.

"Do not apologize. You did better than I expected today. The agent returned from the grave, aside."

Tony rolled his eyes and slipped the shirt over his head. "Nice to know you have such low expectations of me."

"I was having trouble getting you out of your closet this morning," Loki replied dryly, " I think my expectations were fair."

Tony smiled at him and stopped in the middle of pulling his pants on when he saw how tense the god was. He felt worry tingle along the lines of their connection. It wasn't the same worries Loki had shown earlier, the ones apparently for his safety. This was something else, something to do which whatever plans he had outside of the tower.

"Hey," Tony said, moving closer to wrap his arms around Loki's waist. "Lokes, what is it that's got you so stressed out."

Loki's brow furrowed, and Tony was tempted to press it back down to smooth out the wrinkles that formed there. They stood still for a moment before the god answered.

"I shan't tell you until I'm sure, but I want you to keep your JARVIS on high alert," he said carefully. "Fury may have left, but I know better than to accept a retreat from that man."

Tony scoffed and rolled his eyes dramatically. Who did Loki think he was?

"Excuse me? I know better than to let my guard down. Tower's on lock down until I know more about what's going on."

"Perfect. I promise to return before dinner."

"Is that a date?"

Loki smiled and gave him one last chaste kiss. "Yes, it is," he said before disappearing from Tony's arms.

It left him feeling cold and disorientated. He was really gonna have to say something to Loki about that.

To say Fury was pissed off, would be putting it lightly. His plan to distract Stark with Coulson went badly, at best. The whole magical glass levitating act was unexpected and threw everything off. The whole 'Stark using Magic' thing, was down right *terrifying*. Not to mention, something SHIELD was going to need to take care of. Soon.

So when Fury reached the meeting place in Detroit, half his plans gone array, and no red head in sight. He may or may not have shot out a few pipes to blow off steam.

"Am I to take this display as proof that your plan failed?" Came the cool voice of the red head.

"No," Fury grunted, slipping his gun back into the holster, but not clipping it shut. "Everything went well enough. Stark may not be distracted for the same reason as I planned, but he's traumatized enough to be hiding in his room right now."

There was a flicker of something before the red head's face showed confusion. "You know this *how*?"

"While I was doing the song and dance with Stark, my agents placed a bug into his system. We've had eyes and ears on him since we left." Fury paused and looked her in the eye. "Which brings me to our next subject."

The woman nodded for him to continue.

"Loki left the building with some purpose to supposedly 'help Stark'. Now, we usually can track his magic signature when he actually uses magic. The problem is, he used it once when he left the tower, and once somewhere in the city. Since then, he's been off the grid."

"That's a problem, Director."

"Not for much longer. We'll smoke him out with an arrested Tony Stark," Fury replied, unable to hide a hint of glee behind his words. The glass was the last straw for him, after all the shit that man had put him through.

The woman's red painted lips drew together in a thin line before she reached her hand out for the file Fury had brought her. "I assume you managed the tower's security, then?"

"We found a back door in and out. Your agents can slip in undetected, capture the target, and leave without a single confrontation with the avengers."

The woman looked over the file, before responding dryly, "sounds too good to be true, Mr. Fury."

"Trust me, it was not fucking easy to set this up and there is one major problem your agents have to look forward to."

"Other than Loki showing up mid mission?"

"Other than that, Stark seems to now possess some sort of magic. He's a danger to everyone around him, and I'm guessing he won't be pleasant to unexpected company."

"Magic..." She said softly. "This means you have another reason for his capture. Planning on studying him?"

"Studying him, and neutralizing him if I need to. The man nearly killed his own team today in a little fit."

There was that flash in the red head's green eyes again. It touched a memory ever so slightly in the back of his mind. Fury frowned, trying to figure out why it seemed so familiar.

"We will take care of this tonight. HYDRA will hold Tony Stark until we get who we want. Then," she gestured to him with a manicured hand, "we will hand him over to you."

"Sounds like a plan," Fury replied before his com link went off. "Sorry to cut this short, something's come up."

"Loki has—"

"Unrelated," Fury said with a bitter smile. "I've got an agent who's really, really pissed at me right now."

"I see. Please be sure to have taken care of your business before our next meeting time."

"Of course."

The red head turned and walked briskly towards the door.

"Good hunting," Fury called out before leaving himself.

It was already dark when the door opened to Tony's bedroom. Even from the door, one could see that Tony was clearly fast asleep in the arm chair next to the bed. He was holding several take out menus, and snoring peacefully.

The door shut quietly behind the red headed woman, and her heels made no sound on the floor as she crept closer to the sleeping body. For several minutes, she stood above him watching the man sleep. Then, she unfolded her arms and leaned over him slowly.

The red hair shimmered into slightly shorter black, the lips thinned and lost their red gloss, and a smirk formed just as he kissed his lover's forehead.

"Wake up, my Golden Star. We have work to do."

Chapter End Notes

Nick's bad day is about to get worse.

Once More With Feeling

Chapter Summary

Tony breaks a promise to Loki, and scares the god rather badly. In other news, Avengers Assemble.

Chapter Notes

Unedited. Sorry for that and the absurdly long chapter. Just a heads up, there are three chapters left after this. Thanks for sticking around for so long!

The sky had never looked so inviting. Actually, that was bullshit. After being locked away in a dark cave, even the hot desert sky looked appealing. Or the forever overcast one in Jotunheim, after being trapped in yet another cave. Or even just your average blue sky, after flying through a portal into alien space and nearly dying. But today, Tony didn't need any special reasoning. The sky just called to him.

I have time before the meeting to fly around a bit.

Loki doesn't need me yet, anyway.

I haven't flown since I got back.

My suit should be aired out.

It's cold out, suit warm.

Tony smiled bitterly and looked out over the city. It figured that they rescued him just in time for winter on Earth. Like he didn't have enough of the snow and the cold as it was.

"I hate everything," he muttered and pulled his coat closer around him. Loki had expressly forbid him from coming out on the roof after reading the entire journal Tony had kept in Jotunheim. The god was under the impression that Tony, plus heights, equaled suicidal thoughts and sudden death. Perhaps laughing in his face was not the best reaction, because Loki looked hurt and a little scared for a few days after that. It wasn't until Tony promised, lied, and pretended to take it seriously that Loki relaxed a little.

So there he was, sitting on the roof, breaking his promise. It was simply a habit he could not shake since he came back from the frozen planet. Instead of falling back into the warm embrace of alcohol or even sex, Tony wanted his quiet seat under the sky. He actually missed the frozen cliff side the he had to climb up using only his upper body strength and one leg. The struggle to the top was made worth it by the release in pressure on his brain.

Being around that thing was exhausting. Batman demanded his constant attention as long as he was awake, and haunted his dreams while he slept. The only thing that helped melt that icy tension in his body was the freedom of outside. Somehow, being up there was enough to dull their connection

slightly. That was the only reason he got away with the jump in the first place. As it was, Batman noticed his fall immediately and somehow managed to possess his half dead body and force it to walk back up to the cave. He was like a puppet, with that bastard pulling his strings.

He had kept that part out of the journal. There was no need for anyone but himself to know about that. If he knew, Loki would have been even more upset, untrusting, and maybe a little too neurotic about Tony's safety.

His own neurotic behavior was starting to wear on the others. He still couldn't stay in a room alone with anyone without Loki by his side. The few instances where Loki was out dealing with things, he stayed locked away in the penthouse where he sat there for hours debating whether or not to go downstairs. To brave the fear and the hallucinations for some much needed company. God, when was the last time he watched a movie with them, or ate a meal? He couldn't even remember.

That was another problem, he had been away longer than they had missed him. The group kept quoting things they saw and said while he was gone, then caught themselves and tried to include him in the stupidest ways possible. When that failed, they brought up things he did with them before he left. They could remember what he said, what he wore, his ringtone, even the last joke they shared together.

He couldn't. Every memory with them had been etched away night after night by each torturous nightmare. Meanings became warped, images faulty. Where Pepper remembered Clint laughing with Tony over a prank involving old eggs, Tony remembered Clint laughing at him while he screamed on the floor. Thor would tell them the story of how Tony and he went out clothes shopping, and ended up getting kicked out of six of the stores for various reasons. Tony couldn't remember doing that at all. Although, that one might have been due to the lack of sleep the previous night.

The problem was, the more they tried to bring him back, the stronger the false memories took root. Unfortunately for him, every time Loki dragged him from the penthouse to 'visit' the group, they started right in again. He knew they meant well, but it was literally destroying whatever courage he had just mustered up just to be there in the first place.

Loki understood. Of all the people in the universe, Loki got it. Tony really shouldn't be surprised anymore. It was starting to become more apparent just how connected they were as each day passed. Whatever they had done last week had drawn them together more than before his trip to Winter Wonderland. Yes, they still argued, even pulled each other's hair every once in a while, but they were in sync. They moved together, breathed together, thought together. They acted like an old married couple, soft and comfortable. It was like they actually became one. And if Tony was honest, it fucking scared the ever living shit out of him.

What would happen to me, if I lost him? Would I die on the spot? When Loki lost his soul or whatever, I nearly died with him, and when we got separated recently, it felt like I was running on half power.

But, i'm more likely to kick it, than him.

Disease, suit malfunction, falling piano, I could get hit by a car...

Tony let out an aggravated sigh and watched the puff of breath rise into the cold air and disappear. He wasn't sure if this connection was what he wanted in a relationship, but there it was. Yeah, it was nice to feel Loki when he was near by, and of course the sex was unbeatable, but Tony didn't want to be the death of Loki. Something could happen to his very mortal ass, something he couldn't

avoid this time.

Blowing himself up in the lab used to be a minor worry. Now, he actually had to weigh his options and consider the condition he might come out in from each little adventure. So he could die, that wasn't news to him. He had spent enough of his teenage years trying to die by stupid ways to know just how fragile human's really were. But dying meant so much more now, and that thought alone pissed him off. Tony didn't want that kind of responsibility, but he mostly just didn't want his own stupidity to kill the guy he loved.

Which was why he was on the roof, sitting with his legs dangling over the side and a cup of already cold coffee as his only company. Because up here was the only place he could think, and he needed to feel a little threatened for this to work. Tony glanced down past his feet and tried to squint at the people below him. It was obviously too high for him to make out the details, but he liked to pretend all those moving blobs meant something. Like each little dot running across the city represented life. Tony snorted. If Clint were here, he'd make a joke about 'elf eyes' and they would laugh about it. Or Clint would push him off the edge. Either way, totally worth it.

"Stop it," Tony muttered to himself. Closing his eyes, he forced himself to focus on the emptiness in front of him. He had felt it before on the cliff, and he remembered the rush that came with it. Nothing was there to catch him, all he had to do was tip his body slightly and he could fly.

"You would do this to me?" came a small voice from behind him.

Tony didn't move or respond, but instead focused completely on the bond. As soon as Loki had seen him, he felt a burning throughout his entire body. When Loki spoke, it felt as though cold water had doused the flame. His body grew cold as Loki's sadness took the place of fear.

Well, I guess the experiment is a success.

"Do what?" He asked lightly, turning his head to look over his shoulder at the god. Instead of the disappointed glare he expected, Loki looked devastated. His hair was flying around in the wind, while the rest of him stood frigid. His arms were clenching at his body as if he would blow away if he let go.

"You would leave me?" Loki managed at last, his hollow voice hollow barely audible over the wind. The wind blew the god's hair from his face, showing dark watery eyes. Loki was resigning himself to it, shutting down and accepting Tony's choice. Which was exactly why Tony did this.

With slow, deliberate movements, Tony stood and turned around on the spot before launching himself off the ledge towards Loki. The god almost jerked back when he landed on the roof instead of leaping from the other side.

"Lokes..." He began, reaching a hand out to unfold the god's death grip on himself. "I'm *not* going to die, and you need to stop acting like I will at any given moment. You *really* need stop pretending like you accept it, that's just cruel."

Loki continued to stare at him with the same unreadable look. At last, he muttered, "I could never accept such a thing. I would catch you whether you liked it or not."

"Then why do you look so sad? I mean, Christ, you look like you saw me jump already."

Tony was still pulling at Loki's arms to loosen him up when Loki's answer forced him to stop.

"Because you still want to leave me. Even if you do not jump this time, you have done it before."

"That was *one* time," Tony said with a grunt of irritation, "and I really thought I was trapped there with that asshole forever."

Loki shook his head and retreated into himself more. Tony blinked at him for a moment before he had enough. With a low growl, he pushed the god to the ground and sat on him unceremoniously.

"If you would stop hiding in your little Loki shell and let me talk, maybe you'll understand what the hell I'm actually doing!" he snapped, leaning down over Loki's startled face. The god was gazing up at him, his breath coming in small pants. After a moment, he nodded silently.

Tony sat up, not once taking his eyes away from Loki's face. "I *don't* want to die, okay?"

Loki opened his mouth to speak and Tony shoved a hand over it. "Let me finish. I don't want to die. One, because I like being alive and listening to good music and eating pizza and kissing you..." His glare softened as he continued, "the other reason is that if something happened to me, I think you would die too. And that, above all else, is the one thing that I absolutely can *not* accept."

Loki's worried eyes still gazed up at him from behind his hand. Tony clicked his tongue and removed it to allow the god to talk again.

"Why..." Loki began in a weak voice, clearing his throat to continue, "why would I even want to survive your death? Even if I could somehow avoid it, I would be dead inside. You do not know how strong of a presence you have in me."

Tony felt himself beginning to smile. It wasn't often that Loki dished out some good mushy stuff that wasn't magic based information or part of their 'plan'. "You're a part of me too, you know," he replied. "You're like another arc reactor; pull you out and PLUNK, I'm dead."

Loki winced at the noise and sat up, lacing his arms around Tony's body suddenly. Tony welcomed the hug and fervently snuggled into the other's warmth with a grunt. They stayed like that for a while, just breathing.

Somewhere over the course of the past half hour, Tony's mind had already made a decision for him. Realistically, he knew he didn't have any other choice, but he had to at least asses all his options before choosing.

"I want to try the trials for the sparkle apple," he whispered against Loki's neck.

The god tensed up under him and for a moment Tony thought he had made the wrong choice. Then Loki's shoulders began to shiver beneath his arms, and he leaned back with a frown.

"I'm sorry, was that th—" he stopped when he saw the smile. Loki was laughing, his eyes screwed up and his cheeks flushed pink. "What the fuck? I thought I made you cry. Worry me, why don't you."

Through a smattering of giggles, Loki managed to choke out, "after all the nonsense, you wish to

be immortal. Here I had thought... that... that you were going to leave me."

Tony joined in the laughter as well and reached down to squeeze Loki's hand. "I couldn't leave you if I tried." He paused dramatically and slipped into a southern accent. "I can't quit you."

Loki huffed and leaned close to his face, brushing their noses together in an affectionate gesture. "You will truly spend an eternity with me?"

"If you don't think we'll kill each other, yeah. I want to see the end of the universe with you, babe."

Loki chuckled and continued to nuzzle his face slowly. "You and I shall be right in the midst of it, if all the stories tell true."

"Front row seats. Who wish for more?"

"For the universe to *not* end?"

"That's getting too greedy. Think small. Maybe some popcorn."

"I highly doubt the situation will call for your snack food," Loki replied, tilting his head with a bemused expression. "But I suppose if you must have it, I shall do my very best to provide you with popped corn for Ragnarok."

"If the stories *are* right, I think you're gonna be a little busy right then. Leave the popcorn to me."

Both of their smiles died about the same time. It was Tony who spoke first, knowing what was coming. "It's time, isn't it?"

"It is time, yes."

With a small sigh, Tony stood and offered a hand to Loki, not that the god needed help getting up. Loki stood in one fluid movement, but took his hand afterwards anyway. There was a warmth in Loki's green eyes that Tony hadn't seen in a while. Things had been shit, utter shit, for such a long time. There hadn't been any time for a real heart to heart or just some simple affection. Everything had to *mean* something, designed to bring him back to reality and carefully orchestrated to fit his needs. Tony had had enough heavy shit to last a life time. It was time for some fun.

So he enjoyed the moment a little longer, just Loki wanting to be with him forever, and feeling happy about it with no reservations. A little bit of senseless lovey dovey before they got back to work. Just what the doctor ordered.

Tony grinned at the man he trusted with his love and his life. "Well, come on then. It's time for some show and tell."

Loki could not decide what shocked the group more. Either the news of Fury's further betrayal, or the fact that Tony was sitting down with them and eating. In fact, he looked far more comfortable than Loki had seen him since before their separation. He even had some food on his face.

With a smile, Loki leaned forward to brushed off the ketchup from his lover's chin, licking it from his finger without a second thought. As distracted as Tony was by food and present company, the gesture didn't go un-missed. His light brown eyes sparked with a hint of lust, even as he shoved another bite of burger in his mouth.

"Fury actually ordered you to *kill* Tony?"

Loki turned to the red-head addressing him, his smile turning bitter. "He ordered a supposed agent of HYDRA to kill both of us. You listened to the recording, did you not?"

Natasha shook her head in disbelief. "I just can't wrap my head around it. We didn't do anything so horrible to warrant this. Especially not Tony."

Tony looked up from his food and gave her a sloppy smile and a thumbs up from around the remains of his burger. Natasha looked torn between grimacing at the burger massacre, and smiling at his light heartedness.

"We seem to have struck a nerve by *actually* stealing Victor Doom from right under his nose," Loki said with a satisfied smirk. He did see that as rather an achievement.

"I'm still sulking about missing that," Tony commented around some fries. Loki plucked one from his mouth and ate it, ignoring the pout from his lover.

"We wouldn't have had to break him out, if you were here," Clint added from across the table. He, too, was shoveling food into his mouth with great gusto.

"True," Tony agreed, "but I'm *still* sulking."

"We have a few more important matters that deserve your attention," Steve said from the head of the table. He sounded stern, but there was a hint of a smile on his lips. The entire energy of the room felt alive, almost back to normal. All because of Stark's presence.

Loki had thought on it before, but never did he see just how big of a change Tony really made. The past month had provided a high contrast to what the average life in the tower had been. The others had fallen into separate, smaller groups. The two spies stuck together, no surprises there, where as the captain and Thor seemed to band together in some sort of awkward, blond kinship. Bruce had made an odd friendship with the newest member to their group, Dr. Doom. The fellow mass-murder fit in rather nicely with the rest of them, much to the captain's dismay. He had made no clear move to change things, but Loki had heard him complain more than once about letting the man stay. The last time, Bruce had gone slightly green during the argument, and Rogers never brought it up again.

All in all, it was no longer the tight group Loki remember from his first attack. Apparently, no one had anticipated Stark as the glue that held the Avengers together. But he was, somehow, the one that kept them close and the one that drove them apart.

"Stark, you're going to choke," Bruce warned as he leaned over and offered a napkin.

Loki turned away from his inner musings to watch the simple display of friendship. It would have been simple, if Tony hadn't flinched away from every movement for such a long time now. So when his lover accepted the napkin directly from Bruce's hand, the small gasp from the doctor was

not unprecedented.

"Thanks, but if I'm gonna die, it *should* be by this burger. It's the best god damn thing I've tasted in years," Tony said in a choked voice and continued on his quest to demolish his burger without acknowledging Bruce's surprise.

"I am glad your appetite has returned to you, love, but I would rather you not die for something so dull as inhaling victuals."

Tony laughed and, of course, choked on his food. Loki patted his back and relieved him, ignoring the other huffs of laughter from the archer.

"Anyway," began Steve again, "you two clearly have a plan already, so why not share it now."

Loki swiveled in his seat and flashed a nasty grin at the soldier. It didn't unnerve him as much as Loki would have liked. He must be going soft. "Of course we have a plan," he muttered, slightly put out at the lack of fear he instilled in his...

What?

Companions?

"The plan is this," Tony interrupted, "we meet him in Detroit like we're the HYDRA whoevers and we have a nice chat with the man."

"And this will make a difference, how?" Clint asked, tossing his used napkin into the table and leaning back.

"The difference is, this is the last chat we are gonna have."

His words were met with a startled silence. Clint looked between Natasha and Steve quickly, as if trying to figure out who was going to respond first. Oddly enough, Bruce was the one to take the lead.

"We can't kill the Director of SHIELD, Tony." He smiled bitterly and added, "As much as we may *want* to."

Tony leaned back in his chair and looked around the room with a steady gaze. His calmness was almost unnerving after such a long period of anxiety. "I didn't mean we would kill him. Not unless he tries to kill us, anyway. I mean," he turned to Loki with a nasty smirk, "he sort of already set out to do that."

"What did you mean, then?"

Tony shrugged. "Just because we can't kill him, doesn't mean we can't put the fear of god in him."

"Not to rain on your parade," Clint interjected, "but didn't we already *do* that? I mean, the cardboard cutouts aside, we really fucked with them last time. He's still coming, even after all that."

"Mmm, yes," Loki agreed, looking over at the archer. "But last time he wasn't alone in an empty

city surrounded by a powerful group of angered enemies."

"So we're threatening him? Nothing else?"

"Nothing else," Tony confirmed. "Yet."

Steve cast a weary look down the table at him, but resigned himself to his fate. "When do we meet him, then?"

"In about an hour."

"What?!" Clint shouted, sitting forward suddenly. "You're telling us an hour before it happens?!"

Tony blinked at him for a long moment. "What's the problem, Legolas? Need time to do your hair?"

Clint hissed a colorful collection of curses at him and rushed off to get his things ready. Natasha soon slipped off as well, giving Loki a rare smile that clearly conveyed her relief at Stark's new found comfort around them. Steve went off to find Thor to fill him in on the plan, leaving Bruce to stare at Tony from the seat beside him.

"Alright, you're burning a hole in my cheek," Tony said at last. "What is it?"

"Tony, you sat here with us and actually ate a meal. In the same room as us."

"So?"

"So?" Bruce repeated incredulously, "so you haven't been able to set foot in a room with the group since you got back, never mind actually letting me sit next to you. I mean, not to draw attention to your previous mental breakdowns, but I'm pretty sure a day ago you would have scuttled out of the room if I even breathed in your direction."

Tony snorted and gave Bruce a sheepish smile. "I'm not magically cured, if that's what you're wondering. Even now, I've got this other version of you standing over your shoulder and saying things I dare not repeat." Tony paused and looked at the thing only he could see. "But, whatever. I just have to take it with a little faith that the nicer versions of you guys are the real ones."

"You're still hallucinating?"

"More or less. It's not all the time..." he trailed off to look at Loki. "There are times where it goes away. But I still see you guy's alter egos when you're around."

"I am sure it will fade, in time," Loki added, standing up from his chair and offering Tony his hand. The inventor turned his gaze up to him and smiled lovingly.

Bruce leaned on his hand, still watching Tony carefully. "So why was today so different, suddenly? What changed?"

Tony stood, still facing Loki, and replied, "I made my mind up about something, and everything just fell into place." He turned at last to look at Bruce one last time. "It all just... lost its importance to me. I'm moving on, the hallucinations can suck it and go home."

Bruce laughed loudly at that before excusing himself to go find Doom.

Alone again at last, Loki pulled Stark against his body and tentatively listened for Tony's inner voice.

"Stop worrying, sexy."

Loki tilted his head with a small smile and thought back, *"if I did not fret a little, who would?"*

"Only Bruce, Steve, Clint, Natasha, Pepper, and Thor. Maybe Victor, but I doubt it."

Loki laughed softly and placed a kiss on his forehead. *"I am glad you are aware of how much they care for you."*

Loki felt a wave of amusement over their link as Tony thought to him again.

"They never stop letting me know. I swear Bruce made me over forty cups of tea just last week, and Steve did this weird puppy dog thing from behind a corner to try to talk to me. If I wasn't starving and without my morning coffee at the time, I would have found it cute."

Loki laughed out loud at that and let his hands rest gently on his lover's hips. *"Hann er sannarlega hundur, stundum."*

"I still see a golden retriever in my mind when I imagine him," Tony said out loud. "Does that make me a bad person?"

"I am sure he would be glad that you even think of him," Loki replied lightly.

Tony was still snorting with laughter when they met the others in the common room several minutes later. Loki noted that Stark was unable to meet the captain's eye, much to the soldiers' dismay and Loki's amusement. Apparently, his brother was away with his Lady. A pity, he would have to miss the fun.

When Tony began to lead the way out of the room, several of the group cast confused glances to one another.

"Uh, Tony?"

The inventor hummed and turned around.

"What about your suit?" Clint asked, glancing back at the others as if to ask if he was doing right.

"Right... suit," he replied, sounding uncomfortable. "You know, I think we can do this without Ironman. We did agree on not killing him, right?"

Steve nodded but still looked confused at Tony's decision. When Stark returned to leading the way, the captain leaned close to Loki and whispered, "is he afraid of his suit now, too?"

Loki shook his head. He could provide no answer to the question, since he did not know himself. Just a day ago Stark had been complaining that Loki didn't want him flying, yet now he refused his suit. Something was afoot, and Loki was left out of the loop yet again. That was reason alone to worry.

*Tony has barred me from his plans before.
But things have changed, he should not be leaving me out like this.
Unless... perhaps, things have not changed?
Maybe I misinterpreted something.*

Loki shrugged at Rogers and lengthened his stride to catch up with the receding back of his lover.

"Tony," he called out softly into the man's mind. *"Why do you not bring your armor?"*

"Are you bringing yours?"

"No, but it is not the same." Loki frowned as he caught up enough to see a determined glint in Stark's eye. When he turned to look at Loki, there was a faint smile growing on his lips.

"I just have a feeling, okay? I won't need it."

Loki sighed, both in frustration at being left outside of his plans again, and for Stark's brainless confidence.

"You will be the death of me yet," he muttered out loud.

"Only if you see popcorn, babe. That's when you know."

Loki jabbed an elbow into Tony's side. "Somedays I want to strangle you."

"Weren't we just talking about this? If you strangle me now, I'll miss Ragnarok." Tony elbowed him right back.

Things began to heat up to the point where Stark threatened him with something called a 'Wet Willy'. Natasha stepped in and separated them just as Tony was sticking a finger in his mouth.

"Children, please," she said, giving them a leveled glare. "Let the adults work."

When everyone turned back to the task of piling into a single van, Loki did not fail to miss the flash of sadness on his lover's face. It was gone before he could comment on it, but he fully intended to interrogate him later.

"Lokes, stop spacing out. We have a traitor to string up."

Loki turned away from his thoughts and followed the rest into the van, a satisfied smirk forming on his face.

"I do believe we will enjoy this far too much," he said with a chuckle.

From somewhere in the back, Bruce replied lowly, "I think I'll enjoy it just the *right* amount."

Loki's smile did not fade for the rest of the trip.

Of course, he had to pee. It came with the territory, hiding and trying to be quiet. It was just like it did when he was a kid. Hide and seek was always ruined by someone's bladder deciding that you hiding was the opportune time to fill to the brim.

Damn it all.

His leg started twitching an hour in, and only stopped when Natasha appeared behind him on some sort of ninja string and smacked it into submission. After that, it was solid boredom. Bruce was waiting as back up in the parked van behind another building. Loki had gone off to become a slinky red-head so he could arrive appropriately in his HYDRA issue villain car.

Really, what was up with that? Nothing broadcasts how much of a villain you are than expensive black cars with heavily tinted windows. Now a hot red convertible, no one associates bad guys with that. It's almost a Bond car. Really, these guys could take a few tips from Tony.

In the midst of his thoughts, the leg had started tapping again. Only a few seconds later, an arrow bounced off the metal about a centimeter away from his foot. Tony let out a strangled yelp and glared around at the overhead beams, hoping to catch the archer's eye. When he spotted a slightly larger shadow to his left, he promptly flipped it off and went back to his internal musings.

Where was I? Right, so about the cars...

His thoughts were interrupted again, this time by the sounds of someone driving up to the abandoned factory. Immediately, the entire building grew perfectly still, as if even the pigeons sensed something was up. Tony realized that he was holding his breathe and let it out slowly, his eyes following the lone figure as it entered.

Fury looked smaller than he remembered. Then again, it might have been due to his position on one of the rusted walkways near the ceiling. Tony could only hope he was pulling off the shadow routine as well as the others. He was supposed to be in ninja mode, there was time enough for confrontation later.

Luckily, Fury didn't seem to be interested in checking out the building he was in, and started to pace the floor in long figure eights. The man looked nervous, and Tony couldn't decide if that was good or bad news. On the one hand, a scared Fury meant a weakened Fury. But a doubtful Fury meant trouble.

As if hearing the call of chaos, Loki pulled up in the classic villain car, dark windows and a dead silent engine. The leg that slipped out of the open car door should have come with its own saxophone music. It was by far the slinkiest, pale, disgustingly attractive leg Tony had ever seen. Knowing that it was Loki only made it worse.

"Great," he thought to Loki, "now I have to pee, I probably caught TB from the metal shoved into my stomach, I'm hearing Kenny G in my head, and I'm rock fucking hard."

"Silence," was all he got in return, thoroughly killing Tony's small, good mood.

"You're late," Fury called out, at once stopping his pacing to stand in his usual pose. His arms were crossed behind his back, showing his lack of fear, daring you to try anything.

"I am precisely on time," the red-head replied smoothly, the heels of her shoes clicking

dangerously across the concrete. "You have not been waiting so long as to begin complaining over nothing, have you?"

Fury sneered at her and stepped forward. "Is it done?"

"As we agreed, we brought you Tony Stark," the red-head replied, gesturing behind her. A large bulky figure ducked out from the back seat of the car, holding a very convincing Tony in his arms. Both characters happened to be figments of Loki's magic, but they were rather convincing.

Tony winced a little at the sight of his own body, lightly bruised and draped over the man's shoulder like a lifeless sack of potatoes. His brain kindly brought the memories of when the darkness hauled him up the cliff, making his own broken, useless legs carry him to the cave. He let out an involuntary grunt at the thought and threw up the mental barriers again.

Loki didn't need to know.

If Fury heard the grunt, he didn't show it. Instead, he was staring almost eagerly at Tony's limp body. "And Loki?"

"We were unable to track him before he fell off the radar again," the woman replied easily, "not to worry, though. We will be there when he returns to his lover's tower."

"I don't want a surprised, pissed off god showing up somewhere along the line and giving me trouble," Fury growled. "Especially if he finds out that SHIELD has Stark."

The red-head crossed her arms and looked at him thoughtfully. "What sort of tests are you planning, Director?"

"Since when do we share our business?"

"If Stark is really this... powerful weapon that you say he is, I believe I have a right to know what your plans for him are. We do not like surprises either."

Tony bit his tongue and sunk down further against the metal grating under him. No one else in the room could feel it, but internally, Loki was screaming in rage. The contempt had only grown as the conversation progressed, and Tony was afraid the mask was going to slip if it went on any longer.

"We're gonna see what makes him tick, and then contain him," Fury replied at last, looking uncomfortable with releasing this information to a once enemy. "Stark is too much of a loose canon to be controlled. He'll spend the rest of his days in a padded cell."

"Good," the red-head purred, "that is all I needed to know. *Thank* you."

Tony sat up on cue, 'thank you' being the code word to start the second half of the operation. Phone in hand, Tony accessed the cameras they had set up around the room and saved the videos to his drive at home. After that, it was a quick upload to the internet. He started with all the social network accounts, and headed to the darker sides of the internet to release other parts of the same video. The trick was to make it obvious that parts were missing from the more public videos, so people got curious and searched for the full story. The more people looked, the more wide spread it became.

Tony smiled as JARVIS confirmed the uploads and started recording the statistics immediately. He

slipped his phone back into his pocket and stood up, making his way over to the metal ladder to join Natasha who was waiting for him.

"Ready?" She whispered.

"I'm so eager I could dance."

Natasha spared a moment to give him a look that clearly begged for him not to dance. She slid down the ladder quickly, leaving Tony to clamber down rather ungracefully. Once on the floor, they circled Loki and Fury by staying behind the beams and dusty boxes long enough to arrive behind red-head and the fake Tony.

The look on Fury's face was priceless. Tony's hand itched to snatch his phone up and take a photo. Before he could even get it out, Fury started to yell.

"What the *fuck* is this?! Stark, what the *hell* have you done?!"

The red-head stepped back, letting the guise fall away to reveal a much taller, scarier looking god. Tony grinned nastily as it dawned on the Director just what was going on.

"So you set this all up... For what, exactly?" Fury asked, his tone instantly reverting to something calm and dangerous.

Loki was down right growling at this point, and when Fury asked, he snapped. "You have been ruined, you useless sack of filth." He paused, his face contorting further into rage. "As amusing as it is that you even dreamed of killing me, my anger at you lies elsewhere. You *dared* to lock my lover away simply because you fear him? To break him apart under your scientist's hands, just as you did to us before. Tare you so unlearned that you do not realize the imprudence of these actions? Tell me, do you think yourself a god, foolish mortal?"

Fury shifted his arms slightly towards his guns and opened his mouth to respond before Loki continued.

"You are no god," he hissed, " Shall I show you the *true* power of a god?"

Loki's fingers were already contorting space, creating sparks of angry green flames. Some of the heavy, metal beams around them were shaking, and so was Fury. It was a tiny tremor, but it signified a win for them. So Tony reached out a hand, and gently touched Loki's shoulder. The air cooled instantly, the metal beams ceased their shaking, and the sparks of angry green died away at his touch.

"It's *okay*," Tony muttered, pulling the god closer to him carefully. Loki let out a breath of frozen air and leaned back into him. It was so easy to calm him, Tony couldn't help but feel a small thrill of victory even as the god's angry eyes lifted to meet Fury's again.

"Do you see now?" He asked, his voice raw.

Fury looked mildly insulted. "What was I supposed to be seeing? All I see a whole lot of PDA."

Natasha snorted quietly and shot a quick glance up to where ever Clint was hiding, as if expecting the archer to provide a comment.

"You witnessed the power of a god," Loki answered and turned slowly to smile at Tony.

"What?" Fury blinked at him with one eye as his hands inched closer to his guns.

Tony blinked at him too, just as confused. Was he implying that Tony's calming skills were godly? Had he suddenly become Buddha?

Natasha asked before he could get a word in, "Loki, please tell me you're not referring to Tony as a god now? I don't think his ego can handle that."

"My ego is quite sturdy, I'll have you—"

The click of two guns aimed at him stopped his argument. He turned slowly to meet face to face with Fury's anger.

"You *will* come with me, Stark. I don't care what kind of magic tricks your boyfriend plays, he can't stop a bullet before it reaches your heart." He paused and sent a challenging look to Loki. "So unless you want to try your luck, all of you will stand the fuck down and let him come with me."

Loki and Natasha both tensed, and Tony could hear all of them mentally curse him for forgoing his suit. He would have to make it up to them later.

"No, no, *no*," he said calmly, brushing past a reluctant Loki. He ignored the hand that gripped his arm and stood fast. "Fury, you seem to be misunderstanding things again."

"Oh? Why don't you enlighten me, Stark?"

Tony gestured to Loki who hadn't let go. "You remember Loki, our resident god of chaos. You *should* be afraid of him."

Fury scoffed quietly and kept his guns trained on Stark. "He looks more like a trained mutt these days. 'Sides, You guys defeated him pretty easily before."

"That was then. You know, when you used Coulson's death to spur us on? Don't think that will work twice, Patches."

Fury grunted at him and gave no further response other than to press his guns closer.

"Why are you doing this, Fury? Because we're dangerous?"

"Exactly. You in particular. The rest of the team is predictable, at best, but you are almost more chaotic than your pet chaos god here. Plus, you've got the public behind you no matter how much you fuck up. If you think you're not dangerous, you really need to take another look at yourself."

Tony stopped, and actually thought about it.

What was it that made him dangerous? The magic was one thing, some new and unpredictable veritable. But even before that, he had his genius. He could create anything, and he chose to create weapons. He saw his own tools used to murder innocents, so what did he do? He made more. For himself. He knew how to manipulate the environment so that he ended up on top.

"Ah," he said at last coming back to the moment with a small start. "I get it now."

"Oh, do you? Well how nice for you Stark," Fury snapped. "Can we get on with this? My arms are getting tired."

Tony shrugged and stepped forward a little, ignoring the small sound of protest from Loki. He reached into his pocket, and held up his cell phone.

"See this? *This* is how I'm dangerous." He stopped and grinned, turning the phone on to show Fury on screen. JARVIS, with his keen understanding of Tony's dramatics, began to play the video immediately. Fury's voice echoed out into the room, sounding as nasty and lifeless as it did originally.

"Do you see where I'm going with this?"

Fury's guns lowered to his waist line, his expression dark. "Who has seen this?"

"By five tonight, the world," Tony answered lightly. "The *entire* world will see you planning to lock away Tony Stark forever. By tomorrow, my loving public will be asking questions. Who is this asshole who wants to take away their precious Ironman? Isn't SHIELD the group that swept everything about the attack on New York under the rug?"

"And my favorite one, from those who have already seen it," he added with a grin, turning his phone to look at the screen, "I quite directly from twitter, *#saveTonyStark he's come to our rescue, it's our turn to help him.*"

Tony made a cute face at his phone. "Aww, look at that. I got my own hashtag. Again."

Apparently, that was the last straw for Fury, because the man raised his weapons and let out a wordless snarl. There was another wizz of an arrow that landed directly in the Director's foot. Maybe that wasn't the best choice, because Fury's first reaction was to squeeze the trigger of his gun. It was as if the world slowed down for a fraction of a second. The bullet only had a short distance to travel from the gun to Tony's head.

As it turned out, Loki could stop a bullet, has as he did with Clint's arrows. Only he smacked it out of the air like it was a bug, sending it directly into the floor.

"Holy shit!" Tony gasped, falling back and ending up in Loki's other arm.

Natasha already had her guns trained on the director. The man was hunched over his bleeding foot, glaring up at them like a cornered animal. Which was what he was.

“Next time,” Loki growled in his ear, “You wear your suit. So help me, if you die from something as stupid as this...”

Tony nodded and straightened up. “I know, I know. Sorry.”

“This isn't over, Stark!” Fury spit out from the floor. “You think a few hundred fan girls are going to matter?”

“Fury, really, who do you think I am?”

“You're a—“

“I'm Tony Stark,” Tony interrupted, stepping closer to leer down at the man, “I'm Ironman, and I have the world in my pocket. Go ahead and try to whine to your contacts in the government. Who do you think they have lunch with to talk about clean energy? Or how about your buddies in the army? Who do you think they get their funding and weapons from? *Or* how about the number of agents that have been going AWOL from your precious SHIELD? Just who do you think they've been coming to?” Tony smirked and lifted his sneaker to gently poke at the arrow in Fury's foot. “That's right, *me*.”

Both Natasha and Loki looked at him in shock. Tony gave them a look that promised further explanation later and turned back to the director. “Any further questions before I go?”

Fury glowered up at him for a long moment before muttering, “What happened to you...”

“I died. A few times. It puts things in perspective and changes your priorities a little. Namely, touch what's mine, and I will drag your through the dirt until you're six feet deep.”

They were back in the van, already heading to the highway before Clint let out an explosive sigh. “Now I see what you meant by not needing the suit. Jesus, Tony.”

Tony chuckled darkly. It quickly turned into a snorting laugh and grew infectious. Soon, they were all laughing a little loud, and a little longer than they really should be. But it was alright, because

they needed it after all that.

“The pen is mightier than the sword,” Tony replied after he managed to find air again, “or in my case, a cell phone is mightier than a metal suit filled with weapons.”

There were a few more chuckles at that before they fell into a silence. Tony could almost hear the countless gears ticking throughout the van. At last, Natasha spoke.

“We have done so much that I would never dream of doing even a year ago. Thing's i'm still not sure we should have done.” She paused and continued in almost a whisper, “What *are* we, anymore?”

Tony looked out at the already darkening sky and, for a moment, wished he was up there flying through clouds all on his own. The moment passed, and realized that he hadn't seen a hallucination since they left the tower. Maybe this was exactly what he needed, his team, a mission, something to avenge.

“We're the Avengers,” he said to the sky, “There's nothing noble about it, we just do what we have to do to avenge those who've been wronged.” Tony glanced back at the silent group and smiled. “Today, that was us.”

If We Should Should Part

Chapter Summary

In which the fight begins.

Chapter Notes

What in the glorious happened to this chapter? My italics and holds went nuts.

I promise this will be fixed up ASAP.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Thor felt a chill in the air that reminded him more of the warmth he had left only an hour before. He enjoyed his short stay with Lady Jane as usual, but now there was a renewed tension between them. Perhaps he should not have asked about the golden apple again. They had been snuggled in comfortably and already half asleep when it simply burst forth from his mouth. It wasn't planned, or even something he was thinking about at the time. In fact, he had been avoiding even thinking about it, ever since her blunt refusal the last time he asked.

He hadn't dared ask again, not with that stubborn gleam in her eyes. The same stubbornness that he fell in love with. A stubbornness that could be hurtful when it was directed against him.

After his sleepy questioning, she pushed him away both mentally and physically. Apparently he had ruined their pleasant evening by bringing it up, and had heavily disrespected her decision. Somehow, Thor couldn't help feeling more hurt by her anger than guiltily for his honesty. She needn't repel him so harshly for something as simple as asking. Jane must have known how hard it was for him to ask, to even consider taking her away from the world she loves. Thor hated to imagine what it would be like for her to watch her friends and family age and die without her. But he hated the thought of watching her age and die without him all the more.

So, feeling selfish and hollow, Thor returned to the tower in a dark mood and was instantly greeted by a wall of sound as he entered the common room. It was so unexpected, Thor was already lifting his hammer to attack before he realized they were the sounds of a celebration. There was music blaring throughout the room, just barely masking the shouts coming from a rather drunk Clint. Bruce was also looking a bit red in the face and seemed to be singing along to the song from, literally, under the table. Thor could not hold back a smile at the sight of Natasha surrounded by vodka bottles like some sort of bottle stronghold. He had not seen a celebration like this since long

before Stark's disappearance.

Speaking of Stark, he was standing there in the center of the room talking and laughing with them all. It came as such a shock, Thor froze in the doorway and questioned what his eyes were seeing.

Loki was leaning against Stark and had just whispered something into his ear that sent the man into a fit of laughter. Thor's heart swelled as Loki joined in, and the couple laughed long and loudly. It was a sight so sorely missed, that Thor swore to burn into his memory. He would treasure moments like these, because this past year alone had shown him how fleeting happiness could be. How easily the ones you love could be lost, or how heavy the weight of that loss felt. Darker days were sure to come, if such a skilled enemy was still roaming the realms. Thor watched a while longer, attempting to take in every sight and smell, every ounce of goodness his friends radiated.

"THOOOOOR!" Clint bellowed, doing a fine impression of Thor's usual boisterous call.

Nearly everyone turned to look at him, with the exception of Bruce, who seemed to be more interested in his own hands at the moment.

"Thor, nice to see ya, buddy!" Stark called out and walked right up to him. He had to lean close for Thor to hear him, hesitating only the slightest when his eyes flickered to the side for a moment. There was a flash of fear that left as quickly as it came.

"Care to join us?" he yelled into Thor's ear.

"I would love to, Tony," Thor replied, shaken by Stark's sudden nearness, knowing that any moment now the man would fall into a panic. "Are you well?"

"I'm ignoring the evil hallucinations, if that's what you're asking."

"You still see them, then?" Thor asked, frowning down at his friend in concern.

"They come and go. I'm ignoring them the best I can, for now."

Thor frowned more, realizing what the man had looked at over his shoulder. He could only

imagine what Stark was seeing and hearing at the moment. Loki had explained to him some of Stark's visions after a particularly rough night spent in the mortal's dreams. His brother had come to find him in the morning looking shaken and sick.

Thor backed away and said, "my apologies, friend. I shall leave you all to your celebration."

Tony grabbed his arm and flashed a grin. It was nearly honest. "No, no," he called out, "Party with us! We are much more fun than dreams about eating Pop-Tarts off of Jane."

Thor sputtered and allowed Tony to pull him further into the room. "How... How did you come to know of t-this?!"

"Weeeelll," Stark answered, rolling his eyes towards Loki, "maybe next time don't tell the trickster."

"BROTHER!?"

Loki turned around, already looking bemused. Thor scowled, realizing that Stark and his brother were communicating through the mind link again. As happy news as that was, he was still angered at the betrayal of trust. "I confessed my dreams to you in strict confidence, brother."

"I only told my other half," Loki replied smoothly, "consider it safe between you and I... and a shorter me."

"Hey!"

Thor ignored Stark and continued to glare at his brother. "It was not yours to tell! I was very concerned about... the meaning of such dreams. I trusted your knowledge to aid me, and yet you share my story for petty humor!"

"Thor, honestly, why are you so surprised? This is me. If you do recall, I also told Sif about your damp sheets after your dreams of her wearing—"

"STOP! Do not say it!"

Both men in front of him laughed at his outburst to the point of tears. Thor glowered at them and felt his cheeks burn with embarrassment. The pleasure he had gained from seeing his brother and Stark returned to the group was dwindling under the growing weight of discomfort. But Loki changed his mood as swiftly as he ruined it by reaching out and pulling him into a warm embrace.

"Brother," he breathed, utterly shaken by his brother's sudden change in temperament. Loki, who had not given him a hug of his own volition for years before the events that lead to his fall from the Bifrost. Yet here he was, holding him closely as if nothing sour had passed between them in all this time.

"Thor," Loki whispered into his ear, "Tony has agreed to face the trials. I cannot explain it, but instead of joy I feel nothing but an ache of fear on my chest."

Thor's arms tightened slightly around his brother. For Loki to admit his fear so openly meant either his fear was far too great to handle, or he was slowly coming to trust Thor again.

"Fear not," he answered quietly, "for he is a strong man, and the most determined one I have ever met."

He was answered with a tense silence and decided to add a further comment, "you know he truly loves you, brother, for him to do this for you. I must admit, I am jealous of how strongly he loves you."

Loki leaned back and gave him a curious look that soon changed to sadness. "The Lady Jane?"

Thor nodded and let his eyes fall to the floor. "I may have ruined things, again."

He felt Loki turn away, sharing a silent conversation with his lover. Suddenly, Stark wandered off to leave them alone and Thor nearly smiled at his friend's unusual show of decency.

"Brother," Loki began once he turned his attention back to him, "why do you always feel that it is your fault?"

"I may have spoken to her of the trials by accident." He paused and met his brother's eyes. "I feel

little guilt for my foolish mistake, yet I suffer an ache for how she spoke to me afterwards. I fear this time it truly is the end. Perhaps I should apologize to her? I have done her wrong, and did not act accordingly. I should not have left."

Loki blinked at him and started to smile slowly. His eyes sparked with obvious amusement as he answered, "no, Thor. I think not."

"But I dislike these uncomfortable feelings between—"

"Brother, let her be. She will make her choice someday, and you will have not aged while you wait." Loki's smile slanted into a sly smirk. "Events can change one's mind about eternity."

"As something changed Tony's mind?"

"Apparently so. I am still conflicted on the matter."

Thor reached out and clasped his brother's shoulder, shaking him slightly. "Stop your worrying. He has not failed you yet!"

"Who hasn't failed who?" Tony said from directly behind Thor.

He jumped, much to Loki's amusement, and turned to beam at the shorter man. "You have never failed my brother, Tony!"

The man's curious smile slipped from his face, immediately replaced by an startled frown. Tony glanced at Loki, his eyes growing dark as they communicated in silence. From behind Thor, Loki twitched slightly and let out a soft sigh.

"Yeah, I have," Tony said at last, not taking his eyes off of Loki. "But that's kinda why we're here today. That, and we successfully shut Fury down."

"You closed him?"

Tony's laugh was drowned out by a loud crash from behind them. Apparently Bruce had broken through the widow's bottle fort.

"Bruce! Stop imitating Godzilla and get back under your table!" Tony shouted over his shoulder before turning back to Thor, shaking his head. "As soon as I stop drinking, everyone else starts. Well, everyone but Steve. I think he went to sleep at eight. He goes to bed earlier than most kids these days. I think I died a little inside as he slinked off in all his patriotism."

"Tony," Thor began seriously, "I have no idea what you are saying." He ended with a hearty laugh, surprising the man in front of him.

"So you *can* sarcasm. That's good to know because—"

There was an even louder crash that shook the entire room. Thor flinched and shot a hand out to keep Stark from falling.

"Jesus!" He shouted, pushing away from Thor to inspect the damage. "Did Bruce just Hulk out?"

He was met with a stunned silence as all eyes fell on the man standing in the opposite doorway. Victor was lurking in what was left of the doorway, dust surrounding him like a halo.

"Hey there, fellow inventor magician guy," Tony called out, his cheerfulness sounding forced. "What did you do to my wall, and why?"

Dr. Doom tilted his head, his eyes unmoving from Tony. A wide, shark-like smile crept across his face before he replied in a voice that was not his own, "**I am here to collect my weapon, Anthony.**"

The chips Tony had eaten about twenty minutes ago came back up as he stumbled forward and retched all over his shoes. Loki was by his side in a flash, looking terrified and furious.

"Tony, what happened?" He whispered into his ear, his eyes never leaving Doom for a second.

Over the link, Tony heard a babble of curses, concerns, and plans. His panic was contagious, and all his carefully constructed walls came crashing down. Tony groaned and tried to calm his stomach enough to explain. The voice had triggered a complete shut down and he wasn't sure if he was even going to be able to talk. He was surprised he had managed to stay standing at this point.

"He just leaves a bad *taste* in my mouth," he croaked, wiping his lips on a sleeve. Doom had not moved from his spot, but the others had rushed across the room to stand around Tony protectively.

As he straightened back up again, Natasha appeared by his shoulder and whispered, "what is this weapon he's talking about?"

Apparently she wasn't as drunk as everyone had originally thought. Tony cursed inwardly at her question and tried for a nonchalant shrug.

"You know something so don't you *dare* lie!" she hissed in his ear, "especially not *now*. We need to know what he wants and why he wants it so we can take control of this situation. We are losing ground fast, Clint lost his bow somewhere between the whiskey and the vodka shots, and I, for once, don't have many weapons on me."

"We have the Hulk," Tony whispered out of the side of his mouth. He winced when he laid eyes on Bruce's wobbling figure. "Okay, scratch that. We have two angry gods and Steve is somewhere in the building. I know i'm not much help right now, but maybe I can..."

"**Anthony,**" Doom called out, still remaining in the doorway. "**I grow impatient with these games, Anthony. Come to me, now.**"

Tony jerked forward a step and hissed in a mixture of anger and sheer terror. He was doing it again. The bastard was controlling his body like a fucking puppet. Only this time, Tony was still in it.

"Please... *Don't*," he grunted through clenched teeth.

Tony's body took another shuddering step, his spine bending oddly to shift his weight as the invisible puppet master forced him to walk.

"No!" He screamed, a wild force of magic exploding out from him in a shockwave. All it managed to do was make everyone around him stumble, and send Bruce off his feet completely.

"Oh dear, whatever happened to your magic?" Doom asked in a sarcastically sweet voice. **"It seems you forget everything I taught you. Pathetic, really. I had such high hopes for you, my pet."**

Tony was having trouble hearing what he was saying over Loki's panicked thoughts.

What has he done?!

Control, body control.

Must make it stop.

How did this connection begin?

My Anthony... He calls him Anthony.

Stole my name for him.

Stole my Anthony.

Should have never happened.

I should been quicker.

I failed him.

I failed.

I failed.

"Help me," was all Tony could manage to think to him before his body twitched forward again.

With a pained expression, Loki flicked his wrist at his side and muttered something. Tony waited anxiously for the show to start. Nothing happened other than his body moving forward another inch.

"fjandinn goðin öll ok Realms að brenna í eilífum eldi!" Loki screamed mentally at him. He tried again and again, and when each new spell failed, he tried to hold on to Tony's arms. He struggled to hold him back, their feet sliding across the smooth floor.

"Loki, I can't... stop it."

"I know... I tried to use several counter spells, but I cannot break something without first knowing what it is."

Suddenly, Tony was jerked out from Loki's grip, nearly falling on his face. But the puppet master intervened and bent his leg at an impossible angle to stop the fall. Something snapped, and his world went white. He cried out in pain, throwing his head back to take a painful, shuddering breath.

"God-damn-mother-fucking -piece-of-fucking -shit-you... You son of a... Fuck!"

He panted, leaning heavily against Loki's body and Natasha's steadying arm. His friends had shifted forward every time he slide closer, keeping a protective circle around him.

"Babe," he thought desperately, *"don't let me... get taken."*

Loki was still muttering spell after spell, his full concentration on breaking the control. Tony knew when his words reached his lover's ears when Loki let out a whimper and his face contorted in agony. *"No... No. Do not ask that of me. You cannot ask me this, not after everything we have done together."*

Tony turned to him with as much effort he could muster and smiled faintly. He knew what Loki meant. Not after the roof, not after the cliff. Tony Stark was not allowed to die, according to Loki's law. But, if Tony was going to go down, he would go down *fighting*. And, if he can't physically fight the bastard, he would at least take away the one thing he wants.

The weapon.

Aka, Tony Stark.

"Lokes, you have to if I can't... If I can't shake this. You *have* to. I refuse be taken, not again," he begged, his heart racing as he stumbled another step towards the possessed Dr. doom, "please... you of all people know what it's like to spend time with that dick. I won't be able to survive a second time, and I refuse to give him his precious fucking 'weapon'."

"Just give him the weapon!" Clint shouted, a hint of desperation in his voice. Thor tensed behind them and raised his hammer, waiting for some sort of signal to make his move. Tony forced his head to turn to his other side, enough to look at the blond god. Thor met his gaze and raised a questioning eyebrow. Tony nearly grinned in return. A plan had finally started to form.

He didn't need to win right this second, he just needed a distraction to keep the Batman entertained. Something loud and distracting enough for Loki to break him free of its control. Then he could suit up and kick some possessive alien ass.

But, for this to work, he needed to talk to Thor. He needed to give the god information Batman didn't need to hear. So he decided to try something he never did before. He pushed a thought at Thor.

"Point... Break."

He could almost see the words struggle through the air towards Thor. It was painfully hard to get through, especially compared to Loki, but they seemed to reach their destination with no detour. Thor stiffened a moment before meeting his eyes in surprise.

"Smash him with your hammer," he tried again.

Thor's gaze stayed on him as a few words managed to creep back into Tony's mind, *"but... he... comrade."*

"Hit. Him. On. The. Head."

Tony's body shuddered with the effort it took to hold himself back. It was a losing battle, one he nearly gave up on until Thor finally made his move. The thunderer had gone still, weighing his options, before taking a deep, telling breath. When he did attack, it was loud, obvious, and direct. He really was the perfect distraction.

"Loki," Tony hissed, twisting his body around with a new-found freedom. The power's grip had loosened ever so slightly. "Come on! There has to be *something*."

"I cannot break whatever hold he has over you," Loki replied in a dead voice, his eyes dark and afraid. "This is something he established sometime before. I would have to know precisely what elements he used to cast it."

"If you can't fix it, and I can't shake it, what exactly are we going to do here?" Tony snapped. He was starting to break out in a sweat in the effort to keep most of the control. Last time was different. Last time he was barely holding on when the bastard took over and walked him back to the cave. This time, he would fight.

Wait, when did it become so hard to move again?

"**Anthony**," the voice called out, stilling both of them. Loki's eyes met his with the same question.

Where was their distraction?

Tony felt the air cool, and turned to face the Thor shaped hole in the window.

"God dammit, what the hell happened in, like, ten seconds?!"

"I simply followed in our darling Lokes' footsteps. It worked less effectually with you, as I saw in those delicious nightmares of yours," Doom said, his head tilting to the side a little too far to be comfortable. **"Anthony, stop pretending you can fight me. We all know how well that want last time."**

"*Shut up*," Tony hissed, his feet skidding forward again. "Don't..."

He avoided Loki's questioning eyes, knowing full well that the god was already half way to figuring it out. The strong connection needed to control his body? A lost fight? One plus one equals two.

"Why Anthony, you still have not told them of our bonding experience?" Doom asked, "Is that why the female asks you of the weapon? Do they not know?"

"Don't fucking say it!"

"Tony..." Natasha muttered, not taking her eyes off of Doom. "What the hell aren't you telling us?"

"Oh, where should I start?" Doom giggled and rocked on the balls of his feet with a childish grin. "What secrets should I divulge first?" He paused, pretending to think hard on it. "Oh! Perhaps I should tell them about the moment you died? The way your body took me into it, so greedy for life as your soul slipped away. Or how about the way I brought you back to your body? Do you remember, my sweet Anthony? Do you remember the pain? "

The room went oddly silent, and for a moment Tony wished that the son of a bitch froze everyone like last time. The strangled gasp from his left proved that he didn't.

"Died?" Clint hissed from his other side, not daring to take his eyes off of Doom. "You died *again?*"

"*Shut up*, Clint," Tony growled through gritted teeth. His legs had stopped moving him forward, but he still felt the pull. That bastard was letting him stay just so he could watch Tony struggle with his friends now.

Cute.

I should know his game by now.

He likes to fuck with your head, there's a surprise.

Nothing new.

Do not Pass Go, do not collect \$200

"Yes, your precious, mortal lover died... embraced in my arms," Doom said, almost sadly. His dark eyes were locked on Loki, his lips wobbling with fake misery. "It is no fault of my own, of course. He was the one who leapt to his death. I simply brought him back for you." He took a step forward, causing everyone to tense up more. "Perhaps you should be thanking me, 'Lokes'. I gave your lover a life when he threw it away."

Natasha was muttering something in Russian, one hand now holding a broken vodka bottle and the other, a small knife. She glanced at Tony for a long moment before shifting away slightly.

Oh.

She's worried that there's something wrong with me.

Wait, there's always something wrong with me.

What does she think I'll do, bite her knees off?

I don't even have my suit, i'm not exactly a threat.

Fuck.

"Look, you're making it sound like you *saved* me," Tony said, surprising himself at how calm he sounded. "You didn't save me, you reanimated my corpse while my little out-of-body experience me floated behind. Nice trick, by the way, trapping me so that I can't escape... not even in death."

Doom smiled pleasantly and took another step closer. Tony felt Loki's fingers dig into the skin of his arm. He hadn't had the courage to face him yet, but he really couldn't keep putting it off. So Tony turned his head slowly, and looked at his lover.

Loki was pale, his face tense but emotionless. Only when Tony saw his eyes did he know how Loki felt. They were dark and glassy. They were the eyes of a broken man.

"Loki..."

He turned to meet Tony's gaze and tried to smile. It was small, an attempt at reassuring, and it didn't reach his eyes at all. Tony hated it. It was the one of most painful things Tony had ever experienced in his entire life.

"I understand," Loki said quietly. "Do not fret over this."

"You understand what? Because I sure as hell don't understand it."

"Why you did not tell me," he replied even softer, shifting closer to whisper in his ear, "I also know

how to break his bond with you."

"Oh," Tony muttered, "well then. Any time now would be great."

"You *died*..."

Tony tensed up at the tone of his voice. "Don't tell me, that's the only way to break the connection?"

"Something similar. Now go to him."

"Excuse me?" Tony balked, "I know you're pissed that I didn't tell you, but handing me over—"

"Would you just do as I *ask*? I am not sacrificing you to him. You need to be close for this to work."

Tony grumbled, "great. Of course. Why don't I hug him while I'm at it?"

Doom stepped closer again, growing irritated at the lack of attention he was getting. The room darkened slightly. It was nice when your enemy had such an obvious tell.

"If you hug him," Loki hissed dangerously, "I shall show you the anger you fear so much."

"No touching, I get it." Tony turned to face his doom, took a deep breath, and let go. The result was instantaneous. His body practically flew across the room and landed heavily on the floor in front of Dr. Doom.

Doom laughed and for a moment Tony thought it might kill him.

"Oh, Anthony. My little mortal who fights. My Weapon," he spoke in an oddly affectionate voice. **"You turned out so well, met every expectation I had for you. I am so *proud* of you, Anthony."**

Tony choked back the second wave of bile that rose in his throat, his eyes fixated on Doom's feet in front of him. Of all things, of everything Tony feared and hated, the bastard had chosen that tone. That fatherly tone that sounded loving, yet so condescending.

"Don't you ever,"

Tony rose to one knee.

"ever,"

He managed to stand.

"speak to me,"

His eyes blazed.

"like. A. Fucking. FATHER!"

Blue flames exploded from his body directly into Doom's face. There was a satisfying squawk, and several shocked yells before everything was washed out by the roar of magic. The room filled with a light that wasn't fire, and everything was washed away.

Something was wrong. Loki could sense it as soon as the room dimmed and the rushing sound of wild magic faded away once again. Bodies were strewn across the floor, each emitting small moans or curses in pain to let him know they were alive. Bruce, Natasha, Clint...

Tony was not there.

Loki twisted around again, counting. The archer, the widow, the beast, Thor was outside, the captain was resting, but where was Tony?

Where was Doom?

"No... fjandinn það allt til helvítis," he muttered to himself, "not again."

"*Loki...*"

"*Tony?! Where are you? I cannot...*" He frowned, concentrating on his lover's energy. He was near by, only one floor above them.

"*Stay where you are, I am coming to you.*"

Loki stood and without any further explanation to the stirring members of the group around him, teleported away with a crackle. He winced upon his arrival, the air stagnant with magic.

The first thing he saw was Doom, looming over something on the floor. The second thing he noticed was the look of grave disappointment on his face.

"Why do you look so beaten?" Loki asked the creature, already calling up flames to his fingers. "Have you lost so easily?"

"**Oh, Loki. We have all lost something,**" Doom answered, his voice pitching slightly.

Loki froze, fear crawling up his chest to choke his throat. "No..."

Doom stood shakily, the unnatural grace of the creature possessing him suddenly lost. "It seems I have made a mistake. I though he was stronger than this."

The fear shifted into rage, and Loki let out a wordless scream before sending the creature flying through several walls with a single burst of magic. He didn't stop to relish in his accomplishment,

but immediately scrambled over broken furniture to the slumped figure on the floor.

There he was. The missing piece. His Tony.

"Tony..."

Stark's eyes fluttered open in surprise, his mouth opened and a bubble of blood tricked out. "Loki," he croaked, his smile widening with his usual greeting. "Hey there... beautiful."

"Why did he say you were lost?" Loki whispered to him, fingers dancing over his chest to check for wounds. His magic answered the question quickly, and the small flame of hope he held flickered and died.

Tony was crushed. His insides were broken into so many tiny, fragile parts, that Loki could not find where one thing began and the other ended. Then there was his life line, his 'wiring' as Tony called it. Loki's magic sought it out and found more to dead and broken.

Tony's spine was shattered, his insides torn and melted, and his arc reactor was slowly failing.

Too much magic. It was stronger than him, and his body suffered for it.

With a muffled wail, Loki started to press his palms over his body, shooting panicked waves of magic into Tony's flesh.

"Loki..." Stark tried, his eyes widening. "Loki? *Loki!*"

"No! This is not right!" Loki screamed back, fumbling with his power and burning the skin under his hands. Tony didn't flinch. In fact, he hadn't moved at all since Loki laid eyes on him. "You... You cannot even feel it, can you?"

Tony stared up at him in a calm silence, but Loki could feel his mind catching up. He heard, for the second time, Stark's mental checklist. When the mortal asked himself if this was reality, something died in his lover's eyes.

"I can't feel anything... except cold." His mouth hung open for a moment before he muttered more softly, "I can't feel you there."

Loki bit back another scream. Breaking down would not help him, not now. Not yet. He could fall apart later, when his soulmate wasn't in pieces.

"You must hold on, you must," Loki demanded, focusing his power and readying himself for another wave of healing. "I can heal you, but it will be—"

Something bright came from the hole in the wall, and the side of his face exploded in pain. He didn't scream, but hissed in frustration as the powerful shot tore his hands away from Stark.

"Stop this pathetic show," Doom's voice came, sounding less and less like the mad inventor. Something had slipped, and tilted the balance over to the darker half.

"You two were *created* by me," he continued as he crawled through the hole. **"Did you truly confuse yourself that this was a reality?"**

"You may have been the spark that ignited this, but you may not take credit for the roaring blaze it has become," Loki chastised in a mocking tone. "You are nothing but a hot pebble, trembling at the feet of a volcano."

He felt, rather than heard, Tony's laugh. Even through the link, he could sense the exhaustion behind it, but it was still a good sign. His lover could hear him, and could laugh.

Perhaps there is hope.

I just need a little more time with him.

Just a moment.

The dark creature laughed, the tower trembling with it. His power had grown again since its escape from Jotunheim. **"You children really believe that this is a Realm shattering love? Did the ease of the mind link fool you into thinking you were soul mates?"**

Loki stilled, and the flames he already gathered at his finger tips, fell away. "We are. We were born for each other."

"No."

"Do not speak as if you know!" Loki snarled, "you may have spied upon us in our time together, but you cannot *fathom* the connection we share!"

"Oh? The same connection that nearly shattered when I stole his life from him, and truly made him my own?"

The room fell silent except for the sounds of Loki's angry panting and the crackle of magic from Doom's blackened fingers.

"S'okay..." Tony croaked from his place on the ground. Loki could just barely see him from behind Doom's legs. Somehow, the creature had worked his way between them.

"Okay," Tony called out again in his weak voice, "you got me... You got this....beaut..i..ful..."

Loki tensed, only half hearing his words. The creature was stepping backwards, closer to Stark. His eyes gleamed with magic and a sick sort of glee. **"Is he not an adorable specimen of the vermin called Humanity? He kept me much better company than you, 'Lokes'."**

"You tortured me! It is your company that fell short of pleasant."

"And did I not torture him?" He asked, leaning back to smile lazily at Stark. The man's eyes grew glassy and confused as they made eye contact.

"Batman...?"

"See? I even got a pet name," Doom commented, turning his attention back to Loki. **"I think he likes me."**

Something was wrong. Steve ran down the halls, doing his best to reign in the ever growing panic. He had heard the first smash what seemed like hours ago, but for some reason he just couldn't get out of bed.

It was if time slowed and he was forced to move inch, by miserable inch. He had finally broken free of it with the simple application of pain. Pain could confuse the body enough to change one's perception, to the point where one could even fool a lie detector.

Steve grunted in irritation as he met an all too familiar corner. He was going in circles, or elaborate loops to be more specific. Whatever it was, he was a mouse trapped in a maze. No pain could fool his mind into breaking this one, and Steve was running out of ideas fast.

"Come on guys," he panted as he rounded another corner with the same low table and chrome sculpture on it, "come and get me already."

Something was very, very wrong. It might have had something to do with the over abundance of alcoholic drinks in his system, but Bruce felt a little stranger than usual. Which was really saying something, considering he spent all of his time sharing his mind, and half his time sharing his body with a really angry, green giant. There was really no other word for it, other than 'wrong'.

"Zzzguys?" He grunted in what he hoped was English.

"Bruce," came a concerned voice to his left. "Bruce, just lay still. I think you should sit this one out."

"Mmmfine." That didn't sound confident enough. He tried again, louder, "I AM FIIINNEEE!"

"Thanks, my ears aren't fine."

"WHAT?!"

Something slapped his cheek sharply, and the world settled a little more. Bruce opened his eyes cautiously, and was met with two pale faces above him.

"Bruce?" Natasha asked, her hand going to his forehead. "can you hear me alright?"

"Mmmmyes," he mumbled and tried to sit up. The world decided to throw him off again. "Oh god... what happened?"

"That thing Tony lovingly calls 'Batman'."

Clint made a nasty face on his right and looked around the room. "Don't let Loki hear you... Where did everyone go?"

Bruce finally managed to sit up and Natasha shook her head. "I don't know. I'd like to know what that thing did to Thor to keep him down for so long. He should have been back a while ago."

"Do you think he got his hammer?" Bruce asked groggily.

"Do you really think something that kidnapped and tortured Tony is 'virtuous' enough to lift Thor's hammer?"

"Good point. Don't let me ask any more questions until my brain starts functioning again."

"We need to find them, fast. It's been almost twenty minutes since Loki left," Natasha said, checking her watch. "I think Tony was gone before that."

Bruce felt an old familiar, fear creep into his stomach and it nauseate him further. "You don't think...?"

"The bastard took him again?" Clint finished for him.

"No," Natasha answered, looking out the window. "They're still here."

"How do you know?"

Natasha pointed, and they all turned their heads to look out at the city. Every light as far as they could see was out, and there was the faintest sound of screams drifting from city around them. Something *was* giving off light, strong enough to set the closest buildings to the tower alight with an angry, green glow.

"Loki's fighting," Bruce whispered in awe.

"Let's hope he's winning."

Chapter End Notes

to be continued :)

Break My Heart

Tony could hear his heart beating in time with the rush of the tide. He smiled and let his body drift with the waves, swaying back and forth in a way that reminded him of some of his oldest memories. His mother rocking him slowly in her arms as silent tears trailed down his face. Swimming in the ocean and letting himself drift further and further away from the shore, enjoying the illusion of freedom. His first hammock, bought with Pepper and set up on the deck of his Malibu house where he could lounge and look out at the view.

Tony's smile softened as he listened to the slowing beat of his heart. It was peaceful, it was perfect, it was—

" *TONY!* "

Oh, there's dad yelling at me to swim back.

" *TONY, SPEAK TO ME!* "

*I can't dad, my mouth is full of water. I can't breathe, dad.
Dad,
I taste copper.*

" *Anthony... please.* "

Tony forced his eyes to open and gasped. His lungs made a wheezing, damp sound, and he couldn't get enough air. He *was* drowning, except, there was a ceiling above him and there was some sort of flashing lights coming from somewhere in front of him. Tony squinted through a haze of red, trying to blink the dust and blood from his eyes.

"D..dad?" He croaked. He tried to move his arm to reach out towards the two figures that seemed to be moving away from him. His arm didn't seem to be listening to him, which was rude. So, he tried to roll onto his stomach instead, hoping to crawl closer to his father. The rest of his body didn't seem to want to cooperate either. Now Tony was just pissed. His body had no right to be pulling this shit, not when he was drowning. Not when Howard was ordering him to do something.

"Dad?"

" *Anthony? Tony, can you speak through the link?* "

Link? What is that? Wait, who the fuck is talking in his head? That sure is hell isn't Howard.

Tony grunted, and narrowed his eyes at the figures. One seemed to be shooting green light out of his hands at the other. The thicker-looking one seemed to be doing weird stuff with this black ooze that Tony didn't like the look of.

Oh, that's right. I'm in the tower with a broken... everything and Loki's fighting that dickhead.

" *Lokes, I think i'm back from my vacation* ," he thought to him, trying to pull himself together.

There wasn't much left to pull together, since his body still wasn't responding to any of his commands.

" *Hold on* ," came Loki's voice, desperate yet still commanding enough to make Tony want to comply completely.

That's my Lokes.

Tony grinned lazily and kept watching them from where he lay, sprawled on the floor with the side of his face pressed into chunks of glass and who-the-hell knows what else. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, It was the only place he could feel anything. It still fucking *hurt* .

A particularly large explosion rocked the room, and Loki was sent shooting backwards into a wall with a sickening crunch. Tony cried out, choked, and tried to get some air back in his lungs again. It was getting harder every time, and he had the feeling he wasn't going to last much longer.

" *Loki...?* "

" *I am fine, Tony.* "

" *Okay... I'll just...* "

Loki stood, wobbling only a little, and wiped his bleeding lips on his sleeve. His hair was a mess, sticking up like a mad scientist from a bad horror movie. It would have been funny, if he didn't quite look so scary.

" *I'll just...* " Tony tried again, starting to have trouble finding words. " *Juusttfa...* "

Loki's eyes darted from the enemy to find Tony and even though they were questioning and full of worry, flames flickered to life between his fingers, ready for battle once again.

Tony tried to flash a reassuring smile at him, and found he was having troubling moving his face now. His heart beat was back in his ears again, and man did it sound slow. The world started to tilt, and he couldn't remember the last time he had actually *breathed* . Then there was that damn heart beat, or was is thunder? He tried to count between the rolls of thunder and the flashes of lightning.

One Mississippi.
Two Mississippi.
Three...

"EEEUUAAGH!"

His eyes snapped open again as a flash of light hit him, sending his limp body sliding across the floor.

"What are you doing?!" Loki screamed, rushing towards him.

" **Putting the pitiful thing out of its misery** ," Doom answered in the creature's voice, " **No need to draw out his death.** "

Tony was choking again, but at least he was conscious and apparently getting some air. It seemed to be coming from a hole in his chest, but air was air. Who was he to complain?

"Tony, are you—" Loki's voice was cut off abruptly when the room lit up again with another flash.

Tony waited in silence, hoping to hear Loki again. He could no longer see the main part of the room, but was now forced to stare hopelessly out the windows. His eyes blinked furiously as they adjusted with the sudden darkness.

There was a crunch of glass as foot steps drew closer and Tony's eyes flickered up to see his guest.

"Hi, Batman."

" **You persist in such amusements till the bitter end, Anthony,** " Doom muttered, looming over him with a strange, sad smile, " **how is it you continue to impress me?** "

"I don't really... *care* right now... kinda... *dying* ." Tony paused and took in a breath, ignoring the whistling sound from the hole in his chest. "Where's Loki?"

Doom crouched down and studied him with the same little smile. " **You must forget about him. Move on to your next life and be happy this time.** "

Tony might have gaped at him, if he had the energy. Was this asshole really wishing him a happy second life? Who the fuck does that after ruining your current life?

"Can I just... ask..." Tony wheezed and bit down on his tongue to force himself to stay conscious.

Doom narrowed his blackened eyes at him and muttered, " **Stubborn.** "

"... who *are* you?"

The creature's mask fell away immediately, and something closer to Victor came through. He opened his mouth to speak, but a wet cough came out instead. Tony blinked in surprise when suddenly Doom hunched forward, there seemed to be something sticking out of the man's chest. The object pulled out suddenly, and stabbed back through his chest once again.

"Jesus," he hissed, wanting to get away from the blood spraying out over his body.

Doom growled as, what Tony now identified as some sort of dull blade, was stabbed through his chest one more time. This time, it stayed still, leaving Doom to teeter and fall forward next to Tony.

For a terrifying minute, Tony was sure something bigger and nastier had come along and taken out his competition. But then black hair and intense green entered his field of vision. He couldn't resist a cheer.

"Hooraaay..." He fell into a fit of coughing and decided *not* to try cheering again, not with a hole in his lungs.

"Tony, by the Norns..." Loki whispered, a blood stained hand tracing his cheek. Neither of them felt the need to comment on the blood smeared all over his body. Some was Doom's, but most was his at this point. Something was coming to an end and neither of them had the time or energy to care anymore. They needed to hurry, before it was too late.

"Is he dead?"

" **You are more a fool than I ever expected, Loki,** " Doom growled, his voice growing louder and more manic " **Did you really think such a pathetic wound to this body would kill me!?** "

Loki looked away from Tony, but kept his hand lingering on his cheek while he spoke. "If it were *just* a wound, than yes, I would be a fool." Loki gave a nasty grin. "But that is no small scratch."

Doom hissed and started to crawl away, letting out little grunts of pain as he moved. Loki stood in one fluid movement and stalked him like a panther. "Can you feel it?"

" **What have you done... what is in me?** "

"Can you not feel it eating away at you?" Loki repeated, his voice growing lower. If Tony could feel his spine, he was sure it would be shivering. Nonetheless, something cold settled in his chest as he listened to his lover's voice grow deadly.

"You *should* ," he continued, looming over Doom with a cruel grin, "It is your death."

Tony watched with little emotion as the creature jerked Doom's body over to lay on his back. He could finally see what it was that Loki had stabbed him with. It was a crystal, ten times as large as the ones he practiced with and defiantly more sharp. Under all the blood and grime, the stone seemed to be glowing with a faint sea-green light.

Ah, I know that magic.

That's Loki's and mine....

But when did he save it?

Tony decided to turn his focus back on breathing. He could worry about Loki's intentions later, when he wasn't dying so much.

"This is your death, *monster* ," Loki growled, kicking Doom's body with a look of disappointment. The creature turned its head away with a hiss of anger, and met Tony's eyes.

A surge of pity went through him like a bolt of lightning. How could he have forgotten?! This wasn't just Batman in there, this was Doom. Victor Von Doom, the mad inventor who had apparently helped the Avengers get him back. The same guy who had been living with them and had somehow made friends with Bruce. The guy who Tony had *just* finally let into his work shop, even if only to show off. The man he once hated, but kind of had to put up with now since he sort of saved him.

There was still a man somewhere in there, and he was *dying* .

"Lo...ki!" He panted, trying to raise his voice. But his lungs and throat were having none of it. They were done with his shit, and were not longer cooperating.

" *Loki, don't kill him* ," he tried thinking. But something was off about the mind link too, something that drove another lump of cold dread into his chest. It had meaning, the lack of their connection, he just knew it. Something really *was* ending.

" **So I die...** " Doom paused and let out a faint, disbelieving laugh. " **You are much more clever than I gave recognition for, Loki, Son of Laufey.** "

Loki returned his laugh with a bitter edge. "I do not need your recognition not your praise. I do not wish for your suffering, or even revenge. I *tire* of you, " He said quietly, and with that he lifted one foot up and drove the crystal down, driving a pained shriek from the creature.

The stone cracked, and the energy released into the flesh around like like fire on oil. Tony closed his eyes against the screams that filled the air as the magic entered the body. He didn't know what it was doing, but he knew it hurt.

He only opened his eyes when the screams lessened into panting whimpers. The sight in front him was no better than before. All bloodied and battered, Doom lay staring up as black liquid began to bubble from his eyes and mouth. It could have been blood, if it wasn't wriggling as it slid to the floor and pooled.

"Monster, I ask one more thing of you before I rid the Nine Realms of your accursed existence."

" **Ask what you will** ," Doom gargled in response, " **I seem to have no say in it.** "

"Tell me thy name, so I know who it is who tormented myself and love. Tell me who it is I kill today."

" **My name,** " the creature whispered, the last wisps of magic drifting off his body like rats leaving a sinking ship. He shuddered with silent laughter as a sad smile crossed his cracked lips. " **I have long since forgotten it.** "

The last of the black liquid oozed from his eyes, leaving them clear and brown as they gazed up at Loki in surprise. Just as they widened in pain, something slipped away with a small sigh, leaving them empty and still.

The man's head fell to the side limply and the room grew silent. Neither Loki or him let out a sound of celebration. But as he stared at the corpse in front of him, Tony felt sadness for the loss of a lonely, ancient creature and for an almost friend.

He tried to find words to match the moment, but his vision was growing fuzzy and the dull thuds of his slowing heartbeat had started to fill his ears once again. Air was simply not an option anymore, it was all blood, and he was drowning in it.

So Tony closed his eyes and let go.

A seagull called out nearby, and Tony turned his head to see a wave towering over him, rushing across the sand like an old friend he hadn't seen in years. He flashed a grin, raised his arms to embrace it, and let the ocean wash him away.

Steve put on a final burst of speed, rounding the same corner with a little less care than the last sixty times he had passed it. This time, he was going to aim for the wall and break through. He

sped up more for the final lap before there was a loud snapping sound and he ran right into something that wasn't a wall.

The something happened to be a person, who went flying and tumbling over with him as they collided. There were several startled shouts and a loud groan of pain as Steve tried to get his bearing again.

"Rogers?"

"Oh god..."

"Steve broke Bruce."

"Oh *god*."

Steve sat up quickly and looked around in a panic, spotting the man he had run into. It was, indeed, Bruce, looking a little green and a lot bruised.

"Oh lord, I'm so sorry, Dr. Banner!" Steve cried out, crawling closer to hover over his friend. The man was wheezing, but managed to give him a shaky thumbs up before focusing on breathing again.

"Where have you *been*?" Came Natasha's voice from behind him. She sounded concerned, which was a bad sign.

Steve looked over his shoulder at the red head and was startled to see how out of sorts she and Clint seemed. Each had a thick layer of dust over them, as well as chunks of rubble in their hair. Other than that, they looked unharmed.

With a frown and a glance back at Bruce, he answered, "I was trapped in some sort of loop. I was running and running but I couldn't leave." He turned back to the assassins and asked, "what happened?"

"Tony's 'Batman' took Doom's body. Last time I knew, Loki was fighting him upstairs."

"That's where we were headed before you came shooting out of nowhere," Clint added with a weak smile.

"My apologies, I really—"

"I'm sorry, Rogers, but we really don't have time. Tony was up there first, and I haven't heard from either of them. Also..." Natasha glanced back down the darkened hallway with a strange look. "All the lights are out."

"I noticed that in my hallway. Is it the entire building?"

Natasha turned her blank gaze back to him. "It's the entire *city*."

Thor felt as though his journey back was a thousand miles long. But he did it, he crawled up from the darkness into a world of pain and screams. His eyes opened to a city filled with small dancing lights and the panicked cries of citizens trying to move about in the darkness. His first thought was that he had fallen into Hel, and those around him were the souls of the dead. The second wash of pain throughout his body quickly proved otherwise, and he decided that this was indeed, New York.

He sat up from the hole in the pavement, crafted by his own body falling from a great height. Everything ached, but there was nothing too disabling to keep him from joining the battle once more. His hand found Mjölnir easily, and he cast one more worried glance around at the frightened people. The world had fallen into chaos while he was gone, and he meant to remedy that as soon as possible.

His hammer took him to the balcony, where he saw the rooms were dark and most of the windows were smashed apart. He spared a moment to send a bitter glare at the window he had been thrown through not that long ago. At least, he hoped it had not been that long ago.

"Friends?" He called out, feeling, for the first time, a little scared. No one returned his call, so he looked through the room carefully and scanned for any signs of movement. In the dull moon light, he could just make out the glass and bits of table that littered the floor. He swallowed back a swell of sadness at the sight of the banner someone had made for their celebration, ripped and ground into the floor like garbage.

"Thor?"

He turned, hammer ready to strike and lightning at his call. His hammer fell, and his eyes widened in surprise.

"Lady Potts?! It is dangerous here, since when have you come?" Thor asked quickly, approaching the startled woman. She was holding up her phone device, using it to light her way.

"I was called to... to join a party?" She mumbled, her voice raising in question as she looked around. "Dear god, please tell me this is just the aftermath of a very rowdy party."

"I am afraid things have gone awry, my friend," Thor replied solemnly, "we were attacked and Tony was in danger last I knew."

Pepper's mouth fell open in horror, and she looked around more feverishly. "Where is he?! What happened to the city? Oh god, did it take him again? Please... I can't..." She choked back a sob and covered her mouth with a shaking hand.

"Lady Potts, if I might, I suggest you return down to the lower floors. I must find everyone and I cannot leave you alone to be in danger."

"I..." She met his eyes and seemed to calm herself under his orders, "yes, I will do that. Please report to me as soon as possible, though."

Thor nodded and walked her to the staircase door, peering down the long gap in center to check for any danger. There was no sound, or movement, but that did not mean no danger. He frowned deeply and wished he had two more of himself to manage the situation.

"I'll be *fine* ," Pepper said, as if reading his thoughts, "it seems like most of the fight is up here. I suppose I should try to figure out *how* the arc reactor is offline..."

Thor smiled weakly, not quite understanding what she meant and far too pressed for time to ask. With a nod, he set off up the stairs while she headed down, muttering about impossible situations and gods.

The landing of the floor above creaked dangerously as he placed his weight upon it. Deciding to risk the danger, he quickly opened the door to pass through. Here, he could see more destruction. Entire walls were missing or heavily damaged, the floor was littered with rubble and broken furniture. Thor froze when he saw a dark stain half way down the hall that lead to another set of rooms. His grip tightened on his hammer, as he started to follow the trail of blood.

"What was that?" Bruce asked in an urgent whisper.

Everyone in the group froze, ears straining for a sound they weren't even sure they had heard the first time. But after several beats, they did hear it again.

Someone, or something, was creeping down the hall towards them. Well, it was actually stomping down the hall towards them at a quick pace.

Steve turned, firsts raised and ready to take out anyone who walked around that corner. Bruce stumbled back, already painfully aware of his current useless state.

"Sounds big," Clint commented, drawing his bow string back, one eye closed and the other peering through the darkness for the first hints of an enemy.

"It's not walking like..." Natasha paused and held up a hand as the foot steps stopped outside of the door. There was a shuffling sound and a large hand appeared around the corner, groping blindly. A second later, Thor's blond head popped around the door frame and squinted at them.

"Thor?!"

" *Jesus Christ* ," Clint exclaimed, letting out a sharp breath of air. He let his bow fall, but kept an arrow notched and ready.

"My friends!" Thor called out, rushing into the room, arms already spread to hug them.

But Natasha shushed him quickly and glanced around with a sharp glare. Nothing seemed to be disturbed by Thor's outburst, which wasn't necessarily a good sign.

"Thor, have you seen Loki or Tony?" She asked, facing the blond at last.

Thor shook his head and let his arms drop, his cheerfulness deflating immediately. He was still pleased to see that all of them, well, *most* of them seemed to be alright. Bruce was looking pale and seemed to need assistance in standing, curtesy of Rogers.

"What has happened in my absence? I found no one on my way, but blood and signs of fighting."

Bruce wobbled, growing more distressed. "Where *are* they?" He choked out, pulling away from Rogers and stumbling towards the next room. He ignored the warning hiss from Natasha and limped onward. The lengthy pause after his disappearance was filled with weighted glances at one another, asking without words, ' *Now* what do we do? '.

A startled gasp took the decision from their hands, and each rushed forward to follow Banner into the room. As they crowded through the door, they could just make out Bruce by the moon light that was pouring in through a massive hole in the outside wall. Natasha muttered something in Russian and procured a flashlight, shining it on the doctor. His back was to them, hunched over something on the floor. Something, surrounded by what looked like blood.

"Oh god... who... Who is it?" Clint stammered, unwilling to move closer to find out for himself.

Bruce's voice came out, small and cracked, "Victor... It's Victor."

"Is he...?"

Bruce's shoulders hunched more, and that was all the answer they needed.

Thor peered around the room by the weak light Natasha was providing and found an even larger pool of blood. With a frown, he left his friends to inspect the space more thoroughly. Clearly, there had been quite a battle, one that drew blood from either side. But there, there it looked as though someone had landed and not gotten up.

"My friends... I fear the worst," he mumbled, unable to keep his voice steady. Clint came closer and Natasha joined him by Thor's shoulder, giving a closer inspection to the stain.

"Looks congealed already... oh..." She paused, directing her light along a short trail of blood that lead to another pool. "That is a lot more fresh, but it's..."

"It's too *much* ," Clint whispered, "there's too much blood here for one person. No one can bleed this much and *survive* ." The last word came out strangled, and he turned away to find Bruce again. He jumped when he found the man to be right beside him, looking grim but much more lucid than before.

"There's two separate points of origin there. Two bodies created that blood," he spoke in a monotone, "from what I can tell, Victor's wounds are far too extensive to have caused so little bleeding were he's laying now. I would say at least half of this is his." He gestured to the sprayed drops and let his hand fall limply by his side. "Still, Clint is right, this *is* too much."

The silence after he spoke was heavy, as none of them wanted to voice what they were all thinking. After a while, Bruce turned back to the body behind them and stood over it alone. When he spoke again, the words sounded hollow, "if he is here, then where are the other two? Why would they just... *leave* him like this?"

"Maybe they needed to..." Clint trailed off, his mouth opening and closing as he looked for words, "no, you know what, I have no idea why they would be gone."

Thor let out a grunt of surprise and stiffened, causing everyone to turn to look at him with varying looks of alarm. His grip on the hammer tightened, and looked up at them with dark eyes. "They have gone to Asgard."

"What? Why?" Steve asked, "more importantly, *how* ? I thought you were the only one who could use the Bifrost."

"Loki would have begged our father to take them..."

"Loki, begging? I don't think so," Clint commented dryly.

Thor met his eye and smiled sadly. "He would beg to save Anthony's life."

With a Kiss You Will Awaken

Chapter Summary

There is always a price for life, and Tony is the one who has to pay it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He was, of course, greeted by the cold gaze of Heimdall and a spear pointed at his throat. Any other time, Loki would laugh at the man for even thinking he could intimidate him, but now was not that time. Not with Anthony bleeding in his arms, and his magic weak from battle.

"My mother," he croaked, "get me to the queen, now."

If Heimdall wished to protest, he showed no sign of it. Instead, he simply dropped the spear tip and gestured to the bridge. As if he were expected, there were horses ready on the bridge.

But Loki frowned at them and said, "This will not be quick enough, he is... he is no longer breathing."

"They will move swiftly, trickster. Now focus and save your annoying lover."

Loki managed a faint smile at this, and leapt into the horses back with Stark over one shoulder. He didn't have time to worry about what the position was doing to the wounds, all would be healed soon.

He paused long enough to nod a silent thanks to the gatekeeper before kicking the horse into a run.

Heimdall did not lie, for the horse was faster than he could have imagined. The city drew close, and some of his worry started to unclench from his insides. As the castle grew closer, however, his anxiety began to grow once more.

Would they help him? He had done nothing to earn their aid, yet he came here immediately once he found he could not heal Tony. It was an act of desperation, to come crawling back to a place he was cast out from. His magic had been too weak, and Tony had gone too far, this time, for Loki to pull him back himself.

I promise to never go where you cannot reach me.

Was that not the promise they both gave, the last time they were here on Asgard? It was an oath Loki intended to keep, if only things would ever go his way. Just this once, if not for himself, than for Anthony's sake. Hadn't Loki done enough damage to this man's life, without taking it away from him as well?

Loki closed his eyes and felt for the light presence that he had grown to know and love. Tony would always be like a sun to him, warm and pleasant, and intriguingly dangerous at times. He reached out for it, and found little warmth left. It was but a pinprick of light in the cold, dark space. He was losing him.

Loki kicked the horse again, ignoring the startled whinny from the animal, and urged it on with all his heart. The horse leapt up the stairs, setting maids and slaves off screaming in surprise. The doors were already open, far more people than usual moving in and out in a steady flow. He cursed at them and ordered them out of his way, not caring for the uproar he had started. There were just too many people, and the horse could not get through without trampling them.

"Gagnslaus dýr, ykkar allra!"

He jumped from the horse's saddle, trying to force his pains to the back of his mind. As he began to force his way through the crowd, shouts went up, people gasping in horror at the blood pouring down his back and leaving a trail across the main hall. But Loki could not care less, he needed to find a healer or anyone who could help. Even if Odin protested, his mother would not. She still cared for him, she had protected both of them before.

"Loki!"

He turned and found Sif rushing towards him, her expression a mix of discomfort and concern.

"Where is my mother?" He demanded as soon as she drew close.

"What is going... is that the Man of Iron?" Her eyes trailed down to the floor behind him and her face paled instantly. "Oh Hel, you must hurry is he is bleeding like that."

Loki grimaced and tightened his grip on Anthony a little more. "He has lost more than this, it must be my mother. Only she can help him."

Sif nodded and spun on her heel, yelling for people to move out of the way for them and leading Loki out of the hall. The corridors were just as full as the larger halls, bustling with servants who carried a wide assortment of celebratory decorations.

"What have I returned to?" Loki asked, barely able to keep from panting in exhaustion.

She was pushing aside a startled maid before she asked, "Did you forget already?"

Loki gave her a steady glare and shifted his lover's body slightly. "You might have noticed, I have been a *little* preoccupied as of late."

Sif continued on, not bothering to look back. "You're yearly date of return has come and passed. Although you might not be as welcomed by *some*, your father seems to be eager for it. Did you not get the invitation for your return, in all your... preoccupation?"

Loki nearly stopped in his tracks at the realization. He had completely forgotten everything to do with the trial, his promise to the Allfather. The dampness of his back reminded him of why such things meant so little to him as of late.

"It's not important, now," he said quietly, and carried onwards to find his mother.

"Loki, my son, please give me space."

"I am hardly in the way, I only—"

"You are *hovering*," she interrupted softly, straightening up to meet his worried eyes, "my love, you cannot heal him but you must trust me to. Please..."

Loki held her gaze for quite some time before shifting away to the side of the room. His eyes returned to where Tony was laid out on a table, surrounded by flowing colors and light. Only, there was one coloring missing, and Loki knew exactly what that meant.

"It's too late, isn't it?" He whispered, unable to look away from the battered, pale face of his lover.

"Not yet," Frigga answered, leaning over the body holding a sprig of mistletoe and a small chalice of wine. "No, son, not just yet. I shall return with him soon."

Loki smiled sadly at the objects in her hand. "Please greet her for me."

"Of course." And with that, she was gone.

Loki worried his lip, and was unable to keep the tremors from his hands as he approached the table to look down. He would have to wait, he had to trust his mother with his lover's life. He loved her, of course, yet trust was never a thing that came easily to him. It was something else though, a sort of possessiveness over Anthony's life. It was his to protect, his to cherish. Letting that control fall to another felt wrong in ways he could not explain. Perhaps it was the bond that was heightening the strength of his feelings, or perhaps it was just love.

Loki smiled faintly to himself, his hand caressing the side of Tony's cold face.

When have I become so comfortable with that word?

'Love'

Used all too easily for a mortal I should have never even met. I should never have been allowed love, not a long like this. Soul mates are so rare in the Nine Realms, yet I find mine in an enemy? Perhaps fate was on my side for once, not the manipulative monster from the void.

But what of now? In the darkest moments, how could one not question or curse fate? What a thing it was, to craft such kindness and to wreak such cruelty.

Loki ran a shaking hand through Tony's grime ridden hair and prayed for the first time in years for fate to let him keep this one kindness.

Frigga let out a breath as she crossed from her realm into a quiet, dark place. She had journeyed here many times before, but the ache in her heart could never be heavier. She saw death in Loki's eyes, a promise of it to others and perhaps even to himself. Anthony Stark could *not* die, for Frigga feared the end of days would come of it. She knew it was selfish, this desire to save him for Loki rather than himself, but she refused to let her son be a tool of Ragnarok. She would fight for him, and for his lover's life.

So, with her lips set firmly, she strode through the only door to be found and went to find the queen of Hel.

Somewhere in the time she was gone, Loki had crawled up on the table and fallen asleep. He was curled up with his arms around Anthony, so careful of the body he knew was without life. He seemed not to care for the blood and mess he was laying in, only to be close to the man he loved. Frigga smiled down at her son, seeing for the first time in a long while the small child she had raised so dearly as her own.

Her smile grew sad as she touched his shoulder gently to rouse him from what would be his only rest for hours, possibly days. "Loki... it is time to wake up."

Loki jerked awake violently and sat up, turning his sleepy gaze to her. She startled a little at the sight of his face, half smeared in blood. "Have you returned with him?" he asked in a fearful whisper.

"Yes and no," she replied quietly, unsure of how to broach the subject. "She set some terms that we must meet before she will allow his soul to be free of her."

The breath Loki held was forced from him, and the calm front he created over himself shattered.

"SHE WOULD DO THIS? *TO ME* ?!" he screamed in rage and despair.

Frigga pressed forward, laying her hands on his heaving shoulders as he gasped for air. "Calm yourself, my love. There are rules that none of us may break, you knew this." She touched his cheek and ran her thumb across it in a soothing gesture. "You *knew* there would be a price to pay. That is always the way."

"What if I cannot pay it?" Loki croaked, his eyes wide and wet with unshed tears. "Mother, what must I do?"

Frigga's smile returned as she turned away to look at the still mortal beside her son. "It is not what you must do, but he."

Loki stilled, his anger leaving him for surprise and confusion. "What will happen?" He asked slowly, his eyes joining hers on Anthony.

"It is already happening, my love," she answered, one hand tightening on his shoulder, "and it is something he must do alone."

Tony woke up completely confused, hungry, and of course horny. The hungry and horny parts were part of his typical morning routine, but the overwhelming confusion was not. He just couldn't shake the feeling that he had forgotten something really important.

Really fucking important.

Tony scowled down at his sheets and tried to remember what it was. Was there a meeting today? Something to do with the company, maybe. No, Pepper had him clear for today. Today was just for them.

His scowl faded as he went over his plans for the day. It was going to be perfect, of course. First, a short visit to little Italian bakery for breakfast, then on to a walk out in the state park. Not his usual thing, but he could swing it to make his love happy. After that, a picnic by the lake in said park, after he had carefully paid off everyone to fuck off for the day so they could have the area to themselves. Because, it had to be perfect.

Then, they would finish off the day with a garden-rooftop dinner. Red wine, stars, something not his usual AC/DC playing. Probably some violins or something. It would be perfect. I *had* to be perfect.

Tony turned to the, still quite asleep, body sprawled out next to him. Today was going to be perfect, because how else could you describe the day you purpose to a god?

Loki woke up several minutes later when Tony started tickling his back. Of course Loki didn't know what he had in store for him today, he only knew that Tony had a day off and they were *damn* well spending it together.

So, they set off for the cafe where Tony bought him his favorite little chocolate mice. He cracked jokes about Loki and what a cat he was. He got a playful glare and spent the next hour forced to keep himself in check because Loki decided to give himself cat ears and a tail as revenge. As revenges go, Tony would have to place that as the top-most dangerous one he had had the pleasure of experiencing. He finally had to ask him to put them away before he pulled the car over and ravished him on the side of the highway.

They arrived at the park in good spirits, and Tony found he was hungry and horny again.

Really, there should be more to my life than eating and sex.

No, maybe that's fine. There's enough serious stuff in between, right?

Like asking this bastard to marry me.

The park was clear of people just as he planned it, and if Loki noticed, he didn't comment on it. He just ate, and laughed and pushed Tony into the lake.

So, still perfect, if not a little damp, he drove them back to the city. The trip back was quieter than the trip out, and Tony had a feeling Loki was figuring out the meaning of their date today. Which wasn't all bad, but the silence was a little unnerving.

Silence could mean anything. He could know Tony's plan to propose, and be trying to figure out how to let him down gently. He could be considering the idea, and hating it so much he's just waiting to yell, ' *no* !'. Maybe he didn't even know, and just needed a bathroom break.

Or maybe , the hopeful part of Tony's brain provided, *maybe Loki was happy at the thought* .

He spent the rest of the trip back fretting and fidgeting with the box in his pocket every other mile. Tony forced a smile back on his face when they returned at last to the city. Loki had finally inquired as to what Tony had lined up for the rest of the evening, which put some of his worries to rest. At least he *seemed* interested.

The sunset was perfect, the view of the city below them aglow with red and purple hues. Loki looked stunning in the light, wearing a simple black suit with a red tie. It was a sight Tony didn't see as often as he'd like, mostly because as soon as he saw Loki in a suit, he took it off of the god soon after. Tony decided, in a fit of romance, to steal one of Loki's green ties to compliment his own dusty, gray suit. The look it earned him was worth it, and he commented on what a bunch of sappy idiots they were.

The dinner was almost perfect, if the chef hadn't forgotten Loki's favorite dessert, only slightly ruining the lead up to the Question.

Tony was sweating at this point, the dinner in his stomach turning with his rising nerves. So much relied on this moment, everything really. His whole life had changed with Loki, and there was no going back now.

Falling through a portal together, discovering all the lies and betrayals that haunted their lives, and between it all, somehow discovering that they meant something to one another. But it was more than that, so much more. It wasn't even finding out that they were soul mates, or that they had their very own evil-Cupid. It was the discovery that there was already a niche in both of their lives that the other was meant for. A gap that was just the right shape for Loki to fill. He was something he never knew he needed in his life, and now he was someone who Tony couldn't live without.

So today, like every day, Loki was going to change his life.

He cleared his throat, looking across the table at his devilishly handsome boyfriend. He really didn't want to get down on one knee, because that was about five levels of awkward right there. Considering how they met, and how damn short he was, it would feel like a big joke. But it was time honored tradition, so he stood up and shuffled over to Loki, undoubtably making things more awkward by hovering over his chair.

Loki gave him a bemused smile and turned in his seat. His eyes were a brighter green than Tony had ever seen them before, and Tony already knew his answer.

With a deep breath, Tony got down on one knee, pulled out the small, velvet box, and asked Loki to marry him.

It was 242 days, 16 minutes, and 12 seconds later that Tony got the call about Clint. 242 days that

went by too quickly to realize what he would miss. One moment it was their wedding, celebrated by everyone as loudly as possible. Then it was the honeymoon trip, which no other could even compare. Because, really, who else gets to travel all the nine realms in princely style? Well, maybe Jane if she ever decided to stick around with Thor. She still hadn't gotten back to him on that, especially after the call.

It came in the morning, so obviously Tony wasn't going to answer it. Loki did, however, and the crash that came afterwards got Tony right out of bed and down the hall to the living room in a second. When he reached the living room, mid shout for Loki's well being, he saw both Pepper and Loki sitting on the floor looking pale. He didn't even need to ask what was wrong, because there was only one thing that could shake those two up so badly.

The funeral was short, painful, and inappropriately sunny. Tony gave a funny speech that ended far more seriously than he intended, and he was vaguely aware of Natasha lurking somewhere in the back, before she was gone. If he had known that would be the last time he would see her for the next twenty years, he would have said good bye. The next time they met, he was in Russia for a business meeting. She looked right past him and kept on walking.

Something changed, and it wasn't just the Avengers. Lacking two of their members, missions had become difficult to handle, especially with a new mage on the loose. The more difficult part was when one of them would still call out Clint or Natasha's name mid-battle, giving them instructions before trailing off in horror at their own mistake.

It broke Bruce, in the end. Then again, maybe it was the way he was aging, when Tony was not. Or the fact that his life was shortened every single time he changed into Hulk.

Tony was the one by his side, the day they found out about his condition. That past month they had really began to dig in and push all of Bruce's buttons. The experiments had been fun at first, and Hulk had started to build up a weirdly strong friendship with Tony. They actually *conversed* , which was something for the public record.

But then Bruce would come back weak and shaky for longer and longer bouts of time after the change. Then one day it was more than the shakes, it was a heart attack. Tony got him into the hospital in time, but one thing was made clear. If he turned into the Hulk again, he would die. After that, Bruce packed his things and disappeared. Really disappeared this time, because Tony had been able to keep tabs on him until now. This time, he friend was just gone.

What was left of the team after that? Just Tony and Steve, struggling to handle things far to big for two people. Thor had gone back to Asgard to help Odin with some sort of new war going on. Loki had gone for a few months as well, and that had been the hardest part. It was the first time, since Tony had been kidnapped, that they were apart for such a long time. It didn't help that it left Tony and Steve on their own to handle things Earth-side.

When he returned, Loki helped them out as much as possible. But he wasn't always there, and sometimes Tony didn't want him to be. He didn't like seeing Loki out there, hidden behind a different face, fighting for people who would never know what he was doing for them. What he buried behind that mask to save a race he had once tried to rule. They both knew, though, that people would not be happy to know just who it was who pulled them from the fire.

It was hard, for a while. Ten more years and they heard about Fury's death. They had already missed the funeral by the time they heard the news, and they weren't sure if they would have been welcome there anyway. For Tony, it really signified the end of something, something he saw coming for Steve as well.

It was hard, sitting by the soldier's bed instead of standing at his side in battle. Tony wanted to scream at him to get up, to move around, to kill another punching bag. But he couldn't anymore, not after that last attack and left him bed ridden. He was aging, like the time he had successfully avoided was finally catching up to him. Loki had tried to counteract the mage's spell, but couldn't do anything in the end. Different magic, not enough time.

And Steve? He looked at Tony with sad eyes as he grew weaker and weaker. Of all the people in the world, Steve Rogers was the one Tony still strived to not disappoint. It was to the point of irrational, so he did his best to take over the fight all on his own, leaving Loki there to try to save the soldier again and again. But every time he came back to visit, battered and sporting a fake smile, Steve would just stare at him sadly.

It was three days after their uncelebrated wedding anniversary, that he got the call. He was there, this time, for the passing of another friend. Those pale, blue eyes stayed on him the entire time, until Steve said, "I'm sorry, you will be lonely," and closed them for a final time.

By the time Pepper passed away, Tony already had this hollow area inside that grew another fraction of an inch every time he got the call for someone else he loved. He had lived through it all, Rodney, Happy, all of the avengers save Thor. But Pepper, she was the straw that broke his back. Pepper had always been there, even as her hair turned white and she switched her heels out for Velcro shoes.

Something inside of his genius brain just stopped. It reverted right back to when he was five, when he didn't believe that the candy was all gone, because how could such a thing be possible?

How could a world without Pepper be possible? It *couldn't*.

Loki decided to take him away, now that his last connection on Earth had ceased to exist. They went to Asgard for a long while, spending time with just one another. It was wonderful, and he started to forget their faces a little, just enough to smile again. After another year spent lounging around the palace, Thor left and came home again carrying his own grief.

Jane never said yes to the apple, and Tony couldn't help but feel guilty about it. He had served as a prime example of just what happened to a mortal giving immortality. Loneliness. Loss, and just... *loneliness*.

He had tried to explain it better to Loki, who did his best to understand. Loki would see loss, over his thousands of years. Loss in battle, unjust and careless. But he did not get to see lifetimes span out in front of him and end. He did not have to watch his friends die a fair, and natural death. Because there's no place for revenge when someone dies of old age. Just sadness and another empty spot in your heart that could not be filled, not even with rage.

Thor's return signified another end, and this time Tony didn't see it coming. His own mind cracked,

just a little. Loki started finding him in small places, muttering about algorithms and physics until the god would drag him back to bed and tuck him in. Tony could see the fear in his husband's eyes every time he found him, but he still could not tell why.

He stopped being himself sometime after that, and for a while, there was nothing. It took far too many years, and even more of Loki's desperate tears to bring him back again. It was a painful journey for both of them, but when he finally recognized the face in front of him, it was damn well worth it. Because, in the end, Steve was wrong.

He wasn't alone, even if almost everyone he loved was gone. He would be okay, because he still remembered them, and he still had Loki.

He would always have Loki.

He would be *okay*.

So, Tony woke up.

Chapter End Notes

- Oh my god, sorry guys. Don't hate me.

But! Second to the last chapter! We're almost done...

You'll Be Mine

Chapter Summary

It was the worst of times, it was the best of times. Welcome to the end.

Chapter Notes

We made it! All the way to the end. I won't take up too much of your time, I just wish to thank everyone who read along and pointed out mistakes and betad for me. You guys are the best, and It's been a pleasure to write and talk and... oh all that good stuff. Enjoy!

Loki had been so focused on his lover's face, that when Anthony's eyes snapped open he nearly flung himself backwards off the table. He just managed to catch himself, slipping back towards his love in the mess of blood. Loki was already regretting greeting Tony looking as though he had been through a slaughtering, but he had no other choice at the moment, considering how weak his magic was. It wasn't as though Tony looked much better.

"Tony!" He shouted, causing the man to flinch away from the sound of his voice. Loki tried again more gently, "Tony, can you hear me?"

Stark was looking up at him strangely, one hand waving in between their faces before a small smile formed.

"Lokes, hey there," He wheezed in a raspy voice.

"Yes, I am here." Loki pulled him up into his arms for a quick embrace before pulling back to stare into his startled face. "Are you in pain... are you well?"

"Am I... what's going on? Wasn't I outside?"

"Outside? No, love, we were in the tower."

"The tower?" Tony asked slowly, his brow furrowing as he tried to remember. "But we left the tower *years* ago..."

Loki spared his mother a questioning glance, but received only a small shrug in response. He knew she must have known more, so what was her game? She narrowed her eyes at him in warning and he quickly looked back to Stark.

"Tony, do you remember the fight? With Do— the mortal magic user?"

Tony closed his eyes for a moment, one hand rubbing at his blood encrusted temples. "I do," he admitted, "but there's all this other stuff."

"What do you mean?"

"We did so much more after— *what the fuck happened to you?!*" Tony yelled, apparently just now noticing the gore covering Loki's body.

"Oh, this came from you, for the most part," Loki replied, reaching out and touching his face gently. There, the blood was already dry, caked into every crevasse and wrinkle in Tony's skin. His hair had gone dark with it, slicked back against his scalp and hardened. Even though Loki knew the physical wounds were gone, the mess and damaged clothing were still there as proof of the battle. Tony's eyes widened as he finally looked at himself, patting down his body quickly to check for damages.

"I'm not even hurt, so where is all this from?" He looked up at Loki and frowned. "What the *hell* is going on?"

"Perhaps you two should discuss it after a bath," Frigga intervened, gesturing out the door. "I can show you the way."

"But—"

"No, Tony, she is right. This conversation will suit us better once we are clean and better rested," Loki cut him short, pulling his love after him as he slipped off the table. "Are my rooms still taken care of?"

Frigga smiled and shook her head at his foolishness. "Of course, my son. We had anticipated your return a bit sooner. You missed the day, my dear."

"I am well aware of that, now. Lady Sif explained it with some distaste."

Tony leaned heavily against him, distracting Loki from his thoughts of the disappointment he still saw in Sif's eyes. Bridge mending could wait, if he ever wanted to mend them in the first place. Stark may have been alive and healed of his wounds, but he still seemed weak and disoriented. "Ah, forget that for now. Come, let me carry you, my love."

Tony scoffed and pulled himself up as tall as he could. "Thanks, but I can walk on my own, my shining prince."

Ignoring his protest, Loki ducked down, slipped his hands behind his knees, and scooped Tony up into his arms. Amid the grumbling and complaints, Loki gave his mother one last look and mouthed a, "thank you". There would be many more thanks for her later, when he wasn't taking care of Stark and feeling faint himself.

The journey to his rooms was a quiet one, Tony remaining unnaturally still in his arms the entire time. If he hadn't just been dead not but a few moments ago, Loki would have not thought all that much of it. But he had, and Loki still did not know what his love had just awoken from.

Tony cleared his throat and asked, "So, was that all a dream?"

"Pardon?"

"The marriage, the honey moon, everyone *dying*."

Loki stopped just outside his door and stared at him, unsure of how to respond. He did not know what Tony had seen, but it seemed the trials were something of a dream form. The man's eyes had looked almost hopeful until that point, a hint of sadness creeping in when Loki did not have an answer.

"I guess that's a 'yes', then. What the hell *was* that? I never have such lucid, long winded dreams and I'm not even sure I *want* to live forever, no offense."

"I see..." Loki mumbled softly, not sure how to tell his lover that that was precisely what he was going to do. For now, he decided to avoid the subject. "I don't believe you invented that dream," Loki replied instead, nodding his head at the door to open it with a weak spell.

"I will explain momentarily, but I would not expect much, if I were you. I only know a little more than yourself."

Tony muttered something and fell back into a sulk, not even rejoicing as much as Loki when he found the bath already filled and steaming. He had a sneaking suspicion his mother sent a servant ahead to set everything up for him, considering the copious amounts of candles lit across the room and around the wide tub. Which also meant she had a lot more confidence in Stark's success than he had, originally.

Loki gladly let Anthony down and began to peel away his own blood soaked clothing, every so often sneaking a glance at Tony as he undressed. Tony was healed, fully and without any fresh scars. In fact, he looked noticeably younger in the candle light. Perhaps it was the absence of pain in his features, or simply the return of his sun-like energy. The arc reactor still glowed in his chest just as it had before the trials and he could not help but wonder if his lover was already immortal, or if that meant the reactor was meant to stay. He really did need to speak with his mother on the subject more. Perhaps, as much as he dreaded it, he would need to speak to the Allfather as well.

Loki's fingers stumbled over his scorched shirt, falling through the large holes burnt all the way though to his skin as he tried to pull it over his head. After a few frustrated grunts, he was rid of it, earning him a startled, choking sound from Stark.

"You said all that mess was from me," Tony said with a worried frown, coming closer to inspect the wounds, "you *are* hurt, goddammit! Why didn't you say something?"

"I feel fine. Full of energy, in fact."

"Yeah, that's probably the adrenalin talking." Tony paused and ran a hand down Loki's chest, careful to avoid the open wounds. "Why haven't you healed these yet?"

"There was no time, you were..."

"Dead? I was dead, wasn't I?"

"Yes," Loki breathed, unable to look away from the man he thought he had lost, "yes, you were dead. I was too late, too weak. I couldn't do... anything..."

Choking back a wave of tears that had threatened to fall for hours already, Loki looked down at his blood stained hands and tried to steady them. His body was betraying him, showing weakness where he needed strength. Stark needed him right now, whole and capable. He was not going to break down, not when everything was alright. It was pointless, foolish.

"Idiot," Tony said softly before he pulled Loki into a warm embrace. "You did everything you could. You did manage to save me, Lokes."

"I... but I failed you. You *died*, Tony. This time you were gone..."

His lover's arms tightened around him, as if he was attempting to squeeze the memory out of Loki. "Lokes, it happens. People die, it's what we do. I'm a filthy mortal with a short lifespan and a kink for danger." Tony pulled back to look at him with a sad smile, "you forget that sometimes, don't you?"

"Never. I fear for you every single day and it is my only nightmare at night. Your mortality is always in the back of my mind."

"Time give your brain a rest, then. Let's take a bath in your friggen enormous bathtub and forget that we're adults for a while." Tony looked over his shoulder at it and whistled. "I missed that thing. We need one back at home."

"Home..."

"Yes," Tony said, stripping off what was left of his ruined clothes, "that place where we live together with a bunch of... oh *shit*."

"What is it? What's wrong?" Loki frowned, pulling him close to look his body over for whatever was painning him.

Tony gave him a bemused sort of smile and snuggled right into his arms. "Uh, if I scratch out all that shit that was a dream, didn't we just leave the tower with no explanation of where or how we are? I mean, in my head we got back and they were happy enough that we were alive, but that's not reality, usually. Usually they're angry and crying at the same time. Oh, and there's smacking, always with the smacking."

"Oh, you might be correct," Loki admitted, biting his lip, "I had not thought of that at the time, just the need to get you safe. I suppose someone would have contacted Thor about our arrival, at least."

"So they still think we're dead?"

"I know not of what they think, Tony. The last we saw of one another, you disappeared upstairs with the creature and I followed you. I do not suppose they have any idea of what happened."

Tony's half smile fell a little, something dark and sad returning to his eyes. There was the memory, flickering across the bond between them. The body of an almost friend, the nameless being that cost them so much, yet it somehow managed to take away one more thing on its departure. Stark had felt its loss, when no one else had. His big heart had found a small place for the lonely beast, a place now left empty like so many others.

Loki twitched forward to capture his lips, wishing to kiss away that sorrowful look forever.

*No more, please.
There has been enough sadness, enough pain for a lifetime.
Grant this greedy god one more kindness.
Please, take it away.*

Where had that smile from the party gone, and the ease his lover finally felt again around his friends. Why was it taken away again so soon and so cruelly?

Loki had kissed him again and again, before realizing the needy whimpering sound was coming from him and that Tony was looking up at him between kisses with a hint of worry.

Flushed with embarrassment and eyes bright with tears he still could not shed, Loki lead his lover to the bath that Tony said should be in their home. It was time to give their minds a well deserved rest.

The water was warm, the candle light dim, and something in the mood begged honesty from the one named the God of Lies.

"At times I feel like one from your mortal's stories, he who flew too close to the sun."

"Icarus," Tony offered.

"Yes, him." Loki fell silent, worrying his lip a while before he spoke again, "somedays I fly to close to you, and sometimes you shine too brightly for me. The harsher the light, the darker my shadows fall. Where as before, I could hardly see them, now I see them all the more."

"I'm no sunshine," Tony interjected, giving him a small sneer, "i'm as dark and dingy as a New York City alley way."

Loki shook his head, a sad smile forming on his lips. "No, you are no such thing. You may have a shade or two of your own; ghosts who haunt you, but you are not dark. *Never* dark."

"You're both insulting my metal soul, and dismissing a huge chunk of my past."

"Your second skin may be metal, but not your soul."

"It's... no, never mind. I'm not explaining my music to you again."

Loki's smile grew warmer at this. "Please, save me the trouble of feigning interest." He ignored Tony's haughty sniff and the small splash of water, and continued, "this force of power in your chest is not the only source of light in you. Believe me, I have seen it, and when it was gone it only served as a hollow reminder of how bright it should be. You are my sun, Anthony, and it never ceases to amaze me how one so light and strong is bound to one so dark and weak."

Tony shifted, drifting over to Loki to look him in the eye. He was searching for something, reflections of the candle light bright in his eyes as they moved over Loki's face. There was something else about his eyes that Loki could not quite put a name to yet. The color...

Loki's inspection was stopped short when Tony spoke up at last.

"I don't see this 'impregnable darkness' you keep saying lurks around you like some sort of grim reaper. So maybe your hair could use some highlights, but you're pretty shiny to me, babe. I feel warm and fuzzy around you, like a pat of butter melting on some of Pepper's amazing toast..." Tony got that far away look, undoubtably reminded of either their friends, or food. His eyes grew sad once more, and Loki leaned forward with concern.

"You don't have these memories, do you?" Tony asked softly, "you don't know what we accomplished, who we lost."

"No," Loki answered in a soft voice, "i'm afraid those were only for you. Their only purpose was to be a lesson, as unfair and unkind as a lesson as it may be."

"Unkind is one word for it, gut-wrenchingly painful is another. No, don't give me that look, i'm not dying again. Or any time soon, for that matter."

"Do you wish it were not so? Do you loath the thought of an eternity?" Loki asked, unable to hide the slight wobble of anguish in his voice.

He knew the trials had a chance of breaking his one and only apart. He had seen it many times before, small mortals aiming to be more and asking the Allfather to provide them with the means to gain it. The king would always allow them to try, nearly always. The trails served more purpose than a simple test of strength. Character, the ability to assimilate, to grow even when your time is nearly unlimited. Thousands of years to become someone knew, thousands of choices to make. It meant something, to be able to hold true to yourself over the years, but one was often better for the change. Loki was proof of that.

Most men came back from the trials mad, screaming of the future only they could understand. Something in them having gone so wrong, they broke under its weight. The gods would sit upon their raised thrones and watch them babble into the gold floor of the hall, eyes wild with fear. Loki used to make jokes, cast spells upon them to relive moments from their nightmarish future. What had onces been a source of amusement to his younger self, now instilled in him a sense of terror.

What if Anthony had not been strong enough? If he watched all of his mortal friends fall to dust, and lose himself somewhere Loki could not reach him. There was still chance his love could lose his mind, and now that Anthony was, indeed immortal, what did that mean for their future?

"Loki... I was dead," Tony said slowly, his eyes fixed on him, "I *was* dead and now i'm *not*. You said I was too far gone for you to get me, so that really only leaves one option in my book. Something I was supposed to be able to chose for myself. So i'm only going to ask this once..." His lips tightened for a moment before the dreaded question came, "did you give me a golden apple?"

Loki wanted nothing more then to turn away from him and hide in all his shame. To take that choice from anyone was wrong, to take it from Tony was something Loki could never forgive himself for. But he could not run away, not this time. There was no void to let himself fall into, no monster to give excuses for his behavior. Perhaps this time, he should face the pain rather than run.

"I did not choose to, but it happened. The apple was not the cure for your life, but the price. My daughter, Hella, she chose your morality as the price for your soul."

"Your daughter? Why would she... I... so i'm *immortal* now?" Tony asked incredulously, finally dropping Loki's gaze to look down at his body, "I can't... this is too much information at once."

"I believe you are," Loki answered, pulling him close and tipping up his chin to look into his eyes, "I had thought you would receive the power after the trials in some sort of ceremony, but something has changed in you. I can feel it across the bond and something in your eyes..."

Tony mumbled, "My eyes?" and blinked up at him. He was struggling to remain calm, Loki could sense it. But it wasn't the fear that Loki had expected, but worry and pain. He did not fear the future he had seen, but he already felt the loss. He was still there in those memories, feeling the sadness of things not yet come to pass in reality.

"They are lighter, almost gold. Truly beautiful."

Tony huffed and relaxed into Loki's arms, as if the simple compliment released all his worries. The water was starting to cool, but his lover's body was warm, pressed against him with a sleepy weight to it. It was calming, being close to him, unlike the way he clung to cold, dead body for hours before. Regardless that there were still so many more questions to be asked, so much more to do, but he simply lacked the energy to even care anymore.

A man had died by Loki's hand, and that could change everything in regards to his acceptance and redemption in Odin's eyes. Tony was calm enough now, but what of later? When time had passed enough for him to think about it, to linger on the meaning of an eternity. Only he knew of his possible future, and what little Tony had mentioned to him was enough for doubt to grow in Loki's chest. Forever with Anthony was a thing Loki desired, but did not deserve. To stand by his side while he watches his friends and family die around him would be no easy thing, either.

Tony shifted in his arms, pulling his body up onto Loki's lap. His golden eyes flashed while warm hands traced their way up his torso.

"Tony, what are you...?"

"Shhh... I'm full energy, I want you, and I don't want to think anymore," Tony replied in a husky voice, "*please* don't let me think anymore."

"Aah," Loki breathed, pulling his hips down his thighs, just close enough for their chests to brush together, "I wish to rid my mind of these thoughts, as well."

"Then come on, babe. Blow my mind."

He needed this, he needed it so fucking badly his heart was racing from the smallest of touches. That, or the golden apple shit that was running through him was strengthening his libido. Or maybe it was the openly loving look Loki was giving him that was sending shivers through his body. Probably all of the above.

Come on, Tony, no more thinking.

Just Loki.

Don't think about how all your friends are gonna die in front of you.

Dammit.

Loki. All I need is Loki.

"Toooonny," Loki purred, leaving Tony no doubt that the same thoughts were going through the god's head. They needed one another right here and now, fuck the future. He could worry about it when it happened.

He was still exploring with his hands, every so often stopping to venture into Loki's mouth with his tongue. What had been a steadily cooling bath was now much too hot, causing them both to pant and writhe in the water.

"Don't close your eyes... look at me," Tony commanded, one hand running through Loki's dark hair. When the god didn't comply, he gave the hair a small tug. Loki moaned, his eyes fluttering open to stare up at him in a daze. They had barely even gotten started, and Loki was looking thoroughly ravished already.

"Good, Lokes, good. Now *watch* me."

Tony grinned at the spark of curiosity in those green eyes and reached his own hand around to tease his opening. It was a little tight, but he hissed in pleasure just to see Loki's face crumple into ecstasy. He had learned exactly how much Loki liked to watch one night before his trip back to the icy planet. It turned Tony on a lot more than he expected; not even so much the watching, but the expression Loki made when he saw Tony touching himself. Hunger, possessiveness, amazement.

And, just like he always did before, Loki had to take over. A small pot of oil appeared next to the god, and Tony smirked at it. They had used it before, and Tony remembered the sweet smell of it from last time.

Loki's oiled fingers slid between Tony's until both of them had a finger inside of him. The added pressure was enough to drag out a whimper into their kiss. Then, Loki was pulling him closer with that finger hooked inside of him, sliding him close enough for their cocks to touch at last.

Tony yelped, not expecting such a sudden stretch inside of him, nor the heat from Loki's member pressed against his. With another whimper, he pressed his face into Loki's neck, breathing him in. Even with the bath salts, the soap, or Tony's blood, he still smelled like Loki.

How could he have gone so long without this? How many years had he wasted in meaningless relationships, flat connections between him and all those women. He didn't want to belittle what they had, but this really was a thousand more... *everything* .

God dammit, you're thinking again.

"More," he growled into Loki's neck, "fuck me..."

Loki sighed against his skin and slipped a third finger in as he mouthed his way along Tony's neck to the collar bone. Tony could no longer concentrate on moving his own finger inside of him, but allowed Loki to take control.

"You feel so warm," Loki growled as he took to Tony's neck with his teeth, dragging them back up to under his ear. "Even not in my Jotunn form, you burn me."

"I think... the apple..." Tony choked on his words, moaning helplessly when the god suddenly bucked his hips up, causing Tony to fall forward against Loki's chest and press their cocks together

between them.

That was the last straw, he couldn't wait anymore.

"Loki, come on... you promised to blow my mind."

"Patience, I fully intend to do just that," Loki replied, and suddenly a hand was around both their members. "Just a... *little* longer."

Loki's breath was hitching slightly, a clear sign that he was just as impatient and worked up as Tony was. He wasn't even moving his hand, just keeping those long fingers wrapped around both their cocks as his other hand pumped in and out of Tony's entrance at a steady pace.

He could hardly breathe, it was too hot, too good, and Jesus he still needed more. With a guttural snarl, he pulled Loki's head back more violently this time, making the god gasp as his neck was exposed. Tony wanted to taste him, to mark him as his. So he latched his lips against Loki's neck and sucked until he left a bruise. Then it was his teeth again, and Loki let out a delicious moan when he bit down around the mark.

The link between them was demanding he show ownership, and somewhere in the back of his head a part of him craved something more permanent. Proof that Loki was his, forever.

Tony was startled from his nibbling by the sudden empty feeling below. He whined at the loss of Loki's fingers, but was met with fiery green eyes that promised something better

"Oooh, *yeesss* ..." Tony moaned in anticipation, moving up on his knees while Loki slid further down into the water. Tony was now high enough that the cold air hitting his throbbing cock sent a shock through him. It didn't bother him for long, because a second later Loki was pulling him down and sinking the head of his member into his stretched entrance. It was tight, and a little painful, but it did exactly what Tony wanted. His brain shut up, and all he could think about was how fucking much he wanted this.

Stark's eyes were squeezed closed as he began to push up into him. It was tight, which was to be expected. If Loki had thought about it before, he would have brought his lover to the bed. But the need had been too great, and there was something sensual about the large bath and candle light. The chill against his exposed skin was perfect contrast to the heat rising from his groin and the water.

Tony was enticingly warm around his member, and much too inviting to hold back any longer. So, with a small twist of his hips, he pressed up into Tony until every inch of him was inside. His lover let out a strangled cry against Loki's shoulder, his nails digging into his back as he tensed.

"Calm yourself," Loki cooed, "relax, my love."

"It's so hot... Holy shit it's burning me."

"You are probably feeling the effects of the apple, it would be better to expend as much energy as possible— *aah!*"

Tony giggled into his ear, clearly proud of the effect his little hip wiggle had on Loki. Feeling vengeful, Loki gave him a rough thrust, still embedded deeply inside of him. Tony mewled, and rather than rejoicing privately in his revenge, Loki cupped his face in one hand and kissed him. It started out slow, but soon grew passionate and messy. Tony was all teeth again, pulling on Loki's lips, nipping at his jawline. When Loki had had quite enough of his puppy affections, he pulled Tony's body up by the hips, and forced him back down over his member.

"Aaaooohfuck!" Tony gasped, pulling away from Loki's abused mouth to stretch his head back. His view was highly arousing, the muscles in Tony's neck tense and straining, mouth parted as shallow breaths past between his reddened lips. A glaze of sweat had already formed over the golden skin of his chest, and Loki had mad desire to taste it.

What was with them today?

There must be more to this than the apple's energy.

Loki would not have been effected by it, so why?

There was a rumble along the bond between them, and Loki gave into the urges pulsing through him. With a small hiss, he leaned his body against his lover's and started to trail his tongue along the lines of muscle across Tony's chest. Even before he found his way to a nipple, the man had already started to writhe against him. With each wriggle, a spark of pleasure traveled up his spine from where their bodies connected, every tweak of muscle driving him mad. Really, he could cum just from this alone. But he didn't want to, he wanted more, needed more. He wanted to hear his own name echo off the tiles in Tony's lust filled voice.

"As I promised, prepare to lose your mind," he warned, and gripped Tony's hips firmly. Bright golden eyes met his with a challenge, and Loki gladly accepted.

The first few thrusts were slow and deliberate, hardly slaking his thirst. But with each careful roll of his hips, a little more of Tony came undone before him. First, he lost his words, the inventor's babbling of praise and adoration falling into moans.

"Oh fuck, you're beautiful... t-talented all around-uugghnnn! God I can't even..."

Then it was nothing but noise, happy mewls and low growls with every thrust. Loki joined in until he stole them away from Tony with deep, hungry kisses.

His love was staring down at him, and Loki couldn't bring himself to break gaze for a second. He was doing most of the work now, thrusting himself down and grinding Loki in as deeply as possible. Loki intertwined their fingers together, giving Tony's hand a squeeze after a particularly rough buck from his hips.

Tony whined, "Loki! L-Lokes, shit... so *hot*..." and his breath came in shorter bursts as he leaned their foreheads together, eyes fluttering closed. Loki wasn't even aware he was making desperate pining noises until Tony's moans slowed into just gasps for breath. He wanted more than was physically possible to take, all of Tony, *more* of Tony. And before Tony could utter another word, Loki lifted him out of the water and laid him down on the towel by the bath.

"Don't *stop*," Tony begged, his eyes wandering over his body as he leaned over him. The lull was enough to catch their breaths, but the need was too powerful. With a smirk Loki began to thrust into him with revived vigor, enjoying the sight of his lover spread wide and inviting for him.

Something crackled over the bond, and Loki felt his climax drawing closer with each wave of pleasure. That feeling of connection, drawn together in one mind and one body. It was a feeling he had only felt once before, back when Anthony returned to him the first time after. A different sort of fire, a pleasant warmth like that of a sun. Loki's senses grew sharp, and he felt everything, heard everything, smelled everything at once. He heard his name echo throughout the room, he smelled the metallic musky scent of his lover, he felt a tug on his soul, and they collided.

Colors, space, time. Loki did not know what he saw, only that it was beautiful. He could feel Tony there with him and being a part of him at the same time.

In the physical world, Tony's body arched away from the floor, every muscle taught as he shuddered with ecstasy. Loki opened his mouth in a silent scream, his own body filling with tension. It was a silent, almost peaceful, moment. Yet, even as time slowed down for them, their bodies released, ending the silence with a strangled cry from each of them.

Loki fell against Tony with a gasp, his body too weak to lean over him any longer. His breath came in short, smart bursts that trickled into an affectionate chuckle as Tony reached up and ran a hand through his hair.

"Loki..." Tony, said, always the first to recover enough to speak, "Loki, you amazing creature."

"Mmmh..."

Loki felt the body under him shiver, but when he looked up with concern, he found Tony to be chuckling as well.

"I can do this," he said, grinning down at Loki as he rested chin against Tony's chest.

"Hmm, do what?"

His lover's fingers were tracing Loki's features slowly and deliberately while he answered, "I'll be okay, Lokes. I can do forever with you. I think I was meant to, anyway."

Loki's sex daze wore off immediately at his words, replaced by a bubble of happy laughter that earned him a bemused smile.

"Can you, then? You will be mine forever?"

Tony's thumb brushed against his lips and he tugged him up closer for a kiss. His lips linger against Loki's and he whispered, "only if you are mine."

"I am yours," Loki promised.

"Then I think we'll be okay." Tony hummed softly as their eyes closed and exhaustion washed over them both.

Loki curled up against this chest and just as the last dregs of energy seeped away, he heard Tony repeat one more time, "We'll be okay."

Pepper was crying, and Thor had absolutely no idea what to do about it. He kept sending Steve pleading looks and received only helpless shrugs in response. Bruce had not been seen since he brought Victor's body into one of the labs, his face drawn and his movements stiff as he carried the larger man over his shoulder. The two spies were curled up together on the couch with Clint fast asleep, leaving Natasha to look out at the room with dark, unreadable eyes. They had gathered in one of the smaller living rooms on a lower floor, since the upper rooms were still a mess of rubble and blood. They had lit candles and set up flashlights around the room, since the power was still not working.

Pepper had taken charge as soon as they relayed all the information they had gathered from their exploration after the battle. Starting with the fact that Victor was dead, Loki and Tony were missing, and there was an unnatural amount of blood on the upper floors. At first, she barked out orders and went down to the reactor to try to figure out what was wrong. Eventually she was found sitting on the floor next to it sobbing uncontrollably while babbling about mechanics and how useless she always was.

Now, she was sitting in the chair, stiff and silent as tears continued to trail down her face.

"Lady Smith, I shall go to Asgard immediately to follow my brother and Stark. I feel that the threat here has diminished enough for you to no longer be in need of my presence."

"How do you know they even ended up there?" Steve asked quietly from the doorway, "they didn't the last few times Loki did the traveling."

Thor nodded absentmindedly, his answer curt. "No, Asgard is the only place he would have gone. The path was open to him, as it was intended to be."

"W-what?" Pepper stammered, drawn out of her state of depression. "What do you mean a path was open? Asgard expected... this?"

"No, not this," Thor denied, sitting up straight and frowning slightly at her accusation, "Loki's date of return had already passed. I, myself, had forgotten to remind him of it with all the trouble we have faced as of late. He was a week overdue to return for his final trial."

"Oh god... Is he in trouble, you think?"

"I do wonder," Thor admitted, standing up and casting a faint smile around the room, "I am sure all is well. My mother is the best healer in Asgard, and she would not refuse Loki his request to heal Tony."

Pepper whipped her eyes with a tissue and gave Thor a weak smile in return. He had reassured her as much as he could without telling falsehoods. He could not tell them that he doubted Tony to be alive on their arrival, or what might lay in store for them yet. Hope was the only gift he had to offer, so with a final nod, he turned to leave them.

"Thor!"

He paused in the doorway, turning to find Natasha pushing a drooling Clint off her lap and rushing towards him. "Do you have a way to contact us?"

Thor pondered this a moment before he was struck with an idea. "If I do not return myself, I shall send one of my friends to you. You shan't go without news, this I promise."

"Can you promise me one more thing?" Natasha asked quietly, her voice low enough for just Thor and Steve to hear.

"I can try, Lady Widow."

"If Tony's dead... bring his body back for us. Don't leave him there, okay?"

Thor paled a little at the thought. As practical and a strangely caring gesture as it was, the Widow's lack of faith startled him. "I shall do my best to... to bring them back. Please, take care until my return."

"We'll do *our* best," Steve said with a sad smile.

"That is all we can do," Thor replied, and left them to head to the roof.

The Bifrost was unusually loud to him, as if the lack of company made the empty space echo the rushing sounds tenfold.

Heimdall greeted him with his usual half smile that was reserved for just his old friend.

"Tis good to see you again, Gatekeeper. I trust all is well?"

"For the most part, Thor, son of Odin," Heimdall replied, accepting Thor's hug with a gruff laugh. "Your brother passed through here a day ago."

"Is he well?"

Heimdall's smile fell way to a blank expression as his eyes looked across the great distance. " he has been healed, but not all is well."

"Tony, then? Has he... is he...?"

"He lives, but he joins us in eternity, and not by his choice. I fear the king will also find issue with this."

Thor turned his gaze to his city, and wondered not for the first time if his father might be wrong. "You say not by choice? Did Loki force it upon him?"

"No, Hella did."

"Hella..." Thor breathed the grip on his hammer tightening, "he was that far gone, then."

"Indeed. But, my prince, I suggest you speak to them directly. Your brother and his partner are to meet with the Allfather later today. I hope you meet with them before that time, in case there are... repercussions."

"Aye, I shall do just that. Thank you, friend. You have helped me greatly, as usual," Thor said, clapping the gatekeeper's arm once more and stepping out into the bridge. With a swing of his hammer, he lifted off towards his old home, stomach full of dread and a heart full of hope.

"Do we *have* to move?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because both of us are in a bit of trouble," Loki answered from within the closet.

Tony rolled his head over to glare at the empty doorway from which shuffling sounds were coming from. "That's not fair, I didn't die on *purpose* ."

"I shall be sure to mention that to the Allfather."

"Well aren't you in a good mood, smart ass."

Loki poked his head out closet door and give him a wide,very un-Loki-like smile. Which, in all honesty, was a little unnerving to him considering their current predicament. Without giving a reason for said smile, Loki ducked back into the closet and made lots of noise fussing about with chains and gold things.

"No, really," Tony emphasized, "you're *way* too chipper for just telling me we're in trouble. What gives?"

"I'm happy, that is all." There was another loud clink before he added, "Is that so bad?"

Tony's curiosity was too strong, so he rolled out of bed to go inspect what Loki was up to. He found that the god had gotten himself tangled up in a long, thin chain that connected to a golden collar.

"What are you doing?"

More importantly, Why does Loki have a dog leash?

Oh, that's not a bad idea...

Saving to process for later.

"I am attempting to dress formally for our meeting," Loki replied in a choked voice, his eyebrows drawn together in irritation. With a roll of his eyes, Tony shuffled over to help the god out of his tangled mess.

"Ah! No, don't pull—!"

"Sorry! Sorry..."

"Tony! I said *stop* !"

" *Sorry* , just, stop wiggling. Oh shit," Tony cursed and let go as Loki's hair got tangled in it too. "Why aren't you just magicing yourself dressed, anyway?"

"I am still very weak at this point, and I assume the All— skít! You made it *worse* !"

"I said I was sorry," Tony grumbled, reaching out to help again. Loki batted his hands away and attacked the chain furiously with his long fingers. Tony decided he would rather keep *his* fingers out of it, and leaned back against the doorframe.

It was actually pretty cute, watching Loki make a mess out of something for once. He was so used to seeing the regal, perfect Loki, that, or the battered, hurt Loki. That was a different kind of mess, the less cute kind that ripped his heart out just thinking about it. The fact that his handsome soul-mate still could not use his magic freely was bothering Tony a lot more than he was willing to admit openly. By now, Loki was usually zapping Thor from three floors above, or filling Clint's bathtub with leeches. Silly things that, Tony could only assume, took less energy than, say, fighting an immortal void beast. Maybe it was because Loki's two favorite targets weren't here to fuck with, but Tony thought it was more likely that he was just *that* worn down.

"Now *you're* making it worse," he commented with a smile, pushing away from the doorway to steal the chain from Loki's hands. "Let me actually try, this time."

Loki grumbled, "As you did not, before."

"Hey," Tony said, butting his head against Loki's shoulder while his hands fidgeted with the chain. "What happen to your good mood? I was enjoying that."

"It came and went."

Tony looked up to see if it was true, but was met with the same wide smile as before. Loki's eyes were even crinkled up and his cheeks tinted a light pink. He looked adorable, and down right whimsical; which was too much for Tony to handle without kissing that smile right off his face.

Loki hummed against his lips, instantly wrapping his arms around Tony as he deepened the kiss. The sound, coupled with the closeness, was hitting Tony right in the heart, and maybe the groin too.

"Mmh, really," Tony muttered against his lips, breaking the kiss regardless of how Loki leaned in for more. " *Really* , though. What's got you so chipper? You're rubbing off on me, I may even skip down to the meeting with the angry king."

"Is it so surprising, me in a jovial mood?"

"A little, considering the shit we are in."

Loki hummed again and brushed his nose against Tony's with slow, deliberate movements. "I am happy because I have you forever. I know you said you would join me, before on the roof... but now it is a reality. You are mine. You are truly, fully *mine* ."

Whatever Tony had thought the mood was about, he did not expect an answer like that. He was literally breathless at the thought of it. The way Loki was beaming at him, a spark in his eye that had not left since yesterday night, that adorable giggle.

His god -yes *his* - was ecstatic because of Tony.

*Oh god... it's like a wedding proposal, for real.
My future dream thing is already coming true.
Why am I not more freaked out about this?*

Tony shook the memories of a future he never lived from his head and pressed a few gentle kisses into Loki's smiling lips. "I'm sticking around, just for you, babe. Thousands of years of Smurf jokes. I hope you're ready."

"On second thought..." Loki narrowed his eyes at him threateningly.

"No take backs!"

Loki laughed and scooped him up into his arms like he weighed nothing. Tony squirmed a little but gave in, allowing the god to express his child-like glee by spinning him around.

If it were anyone else, he would have purposely vomited down their back already. But, dammit, he broke Loki's eternal sulk just by dying a little. Maybe the rest of his life wouldn't be so bad after all.

"LOKI?!"

Loki froze mid turn and met Tony's eyes with a look of dread.

"No..." he breathed, turning them both towards the closet door. "He needn't have come, a messenger should have been sent."

"I get the feeling they crossed paths, or something." Tony listened as the steps grew closer. "Oh god, here he comes. He's going to crush us. I only got to be immortal for half a day!"

"LOKI!" Thor cried out again in a mix of worry, happiness, and with maybe a hint of a sniffle in there. As predicted, the blond enveloped them in his usual bone-crushing hug, times ten stronger with the weight of Thor's gushing emotions behind it.

"Thor..."

The hug lingered.

"Thor, you will *break* us," Loki groaned, meeting Tony's amused smirk with a sulky pout.

"I thought you dead," Thor replied, loosening his arms only enough to pull his head back and look at them. "I worried so much for the both of you!"

Tony smiled at the teary thunderer and wriggled one arm out enough to pat his shoulder. "Nice to know you care, big guy. But we're alive and well. Well, sort of in a shit ton of trouble, and i'm sort of gonna be joining in the eternity party, but we're good."

Thor's face slowly broke into a toothy smile that ended with an ear-splitting bellow of laughter.

"You have taken the apple?! This is such good news! Brother," he turned to address the slightly blushing Loki, "I am so truly happy for you."

"Thank you," Loki replied tersely.

"But what trouble are you in?"

"That would be my fault," Tony answered for them both, waving his free hand to get Thor's attention. "I think my sexy ass distracted him from remembering the date and then I went and died and Hella, the little darling, decided I was gonna be immortal, or die." Tony paused only to take a breath and tilt his head towards Loki. "Which, by the way, I would like to thank her for. If that's not awkward or anything. Am I allowed to meet the kids?"

Both gods had gone oddly still while he talked, Loki far more stiff than Thor. The cheerfulness of the situation had slipped away into some sort of uncomfortable shock.

"You... wish to meet... my children?"

Tony frowned at the confusion in Loki's voice.

Oops, looks like I just stepped on a land mine, there. Children were a 'no', apparently.

"I, uh..." Tony cleared his throat and tried to keep how disheartened he felt out of his voice. "I mean, if you don't want me to, I totally understand. I haven't even been a part of life very long, by your standards. Or, uh, well i'm not exactly mortal anymore, but i'm not a god either. They'll probably don't want to meet me, anyway."

Tony laughed, and it sounded fake even to his ears.

Dammit, there's no reason I should feel this disappointed.

I like kids, though. But it's not important, right?

Yeah, it is. They're Loki's kids, that matters.

Thor looked between his brother and Tony and promptly released them from the hug, saying, "I think they would like you, Tony."

Loki was just staring at him like he grew another head, which made Thor's comment push the knife in deeper. Loki didn't seem to agree with his brother on the matter of his children liking Tony, and Tony's fake smile faltered. He was itching with a need to distract himself before he started tearing up or something else unmanly.

The chain still needed untangling, so he moved forward and started to work on it without another word. It was silent while he worked his skilled fingers through the awkward knots for a while. The next time he looked up, Thor had disappeared and Loki was still watching him.

"Okay, stop... please," Tony begged. "I'm sorry for asking to see them, it was wrong and I won't do it again."

Loki's answer seemed to take a long time forming. "No," he said at last, "you are not wrong."

Tony waited for more, starting to grow impatient and more depressed by the minute.

When nothing else came, he prompted, "And? If it's not wrong, then why do you keep looking at me like I stabbed a cat and gave it to you as a birthday present?"

"You want to meet them, all of them?"

"Yes, I don't see why that's hard so understand."

"I told you that they were monsters..."

"And we came to an understanding that looking different doesn't mean you're a *monster*, remember? Otherwise, all my monster money is on Thor. I mean, those muscles should not be physically possible."

Loki's blank shock was starting to fade with the color returning to his cheeks. But instead of a happy smile like before, a sudden stream of tears began to fall from his bright, hopeful eyes.

"Oh shit! Shit, i'm sorry!" Tony whined, cupping his face and quickly trying to fix another mess that he had made. But no matter how he wiped or kissed them away, the tears just kept coming.

"Please don't cry. I'm the biggest asshole in the universe and I—"

"I love you."

"I... oh."

"I love you more than I can *bare*," Loki repeated, now following Tony's kisses with his own. The smile was back, shining through the tears like a hint of blue sky during a storm. "I wish for you to meet them. I cannot tell you how much it pains and thrills me that you wish to as well."

"No more of that. No more pain, okay? Shhh..." Tony cooed and ran his hands up and down the back of Loki's neck.

"I *love* you," Loki whispered, nuzzling his face into Tony's shoulder.

"I love you too, you big fuzzy wuzzy."

Loki snorted into his shoulder and Tony squawked when he felt teeth close around his skin.

"I take it back, no fuzzy wuzzy. You're a piranha."

"No take backs," Loki hissed against his skin before releasing him.

Tony grinned up at the teary eyed face above him and laughed. "Don't use my own words against me."

Loki replied with a smirk? "Oh? But there are so many things I wish to—"

"Brother?"

Tony snorted when he caught the way Loki's eye twitched ever so slightly.

"Yes, Thor?"

"Father is calling for you... my apologies."

Tony let out an exasperated sigh and whipped the god's face one more time. "Come on, honey. Introduce me to you dad, nice and proper."

"He's not my—"

"We *know*," Tony gave Thor a look and popped the chain free from Loki's neck. "Oh, would you look at that. Distract me enough and I get it done."

"Genius idiot."

"Enormous puppy."

"Miniature tyrant."

Tony huffed and swatted Loki's ass before running after Thor to avoid the magic sparks Loki was shooting at him. Someone seemed to be feeling better, whether or not Tony had something to do with it, didn't matter all that much right now. He would enjoy the moment, because soon that sad look might return to Loki's eyes. So he did enjoy the smile from Loki, all the way to the golden doors of the throne room.

Loki was exhausted. He could not remember a time where he felt more worn and empty, not even under the thrall of the Tesseract. At least then, the cube was feeding him energy enough to power his body like a puppet master.

But now, he was just *tired*. The battle had taken so much from him, and the death of Tony so much more. Seeing his love standing next to him again, that warm, bright soul supporting him; it was the only thing keeping Loki standing. It might just be enough to help him hold himself up and look the king in the eye.

He did not want to see his father's face, with that disappointed look he always wore when his eyes fell to Loki. He knew there were laws broken, trust betrayed, and that this time it was all on him. But he did not want to see it, not after the best moment of his life had just come to pass.

"Loki," Odin's voice boomed from the throne, and Loki faced him at last. "You have returned late."

"I was busy, as Heimdall can confirm."

"Too busy to remember the requirements of your trial?"

"Well, yes," Loki answered simply, and shifted a little closer to Tony in hopes of absorbing some of his warmth. Tony was already sneaking his hand into Loki's, giving him a quick squeeze, that sent a small boost of confidence through him.

"I see," the king murmured, leaning forward with his chin resting on a hand to look down at them.

Loki was frozen in place, waiting for the disappointment to start and the king's final judgment to fall. Instead, Odin stood up and disrupted Loki's thoughts at the sheer randomness of it. He never left the throne when a trial was happening, what was going on?

He was just about to open his mouth to speak when the king walked straight down the stairs and threw his arms around him. Loki gave an undignified squeak of surprise and glanced at Tony, asking through the link in a panic,

"What is going on?! What do I do?"

Tony covered his mouth with one hand and responded with obvious humor in his voice, *"I think you hug him back, you adorable moron."*

Loki narrowed his eyes and made a face that promised retribution. Tony just laughed behind his hand and stepped back to give them some space. So, still glaring over the king's shoulder, Loki gently slipped his arms around the king. His hands fell awkwardly across Odin's shoulders for a moment, before his fingers curled against him and he tightened his arms around the man he had once called father. Odin let out a soft huff and Loki pretended it didn't sound like a sob while he pressed his face into his shoulder.

It was ridiculous, to want to cry now. The man had not even said if he forgave him, or if he was right, or wrong, or that Loki was not a monster, or if everything would just be *okay*. Something, anything to prove that Loki was still....

An Odinson.

"Loki..." The king pulled back, still firmly holding on to his arms as he looked into Loki's eyes. "My son."

"Yes?" Loki replied tentatively, his eyes flickering back to Tony for a moment. The hand was gone, revealing a wide smile and watery, golden eyes. Loki felt a smile start to form on his own face, his brain slowly catching up with the moment.

"Welcome home, Prince Loki," Odin spoke loudly, allowing everyone in the court to hear him. There was an awkward pause before everyone began to clap and cheer, some more fervently than others. But it was a welcome all the same, and Loki could not help but smile up at them all.

As the noise died down, he looked back at the king and thanked him quietly before slipping back over to press his body against Tony's. He was actually more nervous than before, and Tony was starting to look a little twitchy as well.

"Ah, yes. I had nearly forgotten," the king said as he turned to Stark. "You have joined us all in our eternity." He paused, looking into Tony's eyes with a small smile. "I can see the power in you... I trust the trials went well, then?"

"Uh, well... everyone died and it sucked, but I lived on." Tony flashed a sharp smile at the king and slipped his hand back into Loki's.

Odin smiled in return, but it had grown sadder. "That is the nature of eternity. We can only hope to find someone to spend it with, lest we lose ourselves while we travel it alone."

Tony nodded and squeezed Loki's hand a little harder. Loki took this as his cue to speak up, and cleared his throat.

"Ah, father, I do have one thing... *we* have one thing we wished to speak to you about."

"Yes?"

Tony's hand was gripping even harder now, and a torrent of panicked babbling came across the link.

*"Not now! No no no!
You can't make me ask now!
How do I even...
Lokes!"*

"*Now or never, dwarf.*" Loki thought back with a twitch of a smirk.

"I will bite your knees off..."

Loki arched an unimpressed eyebrow, and Tony cleared his throat nervously before he addressed the king.

"My... lord, er, the Allfather," he began slowly, "since i'm sort of stuck with your son forever, I mean not that I *mind*, i'm happy about that, but since I am, do you think I could... Uh... marry him?"

"Yes."

Tony blinked and let out a startled laugh. "That was fast, you sure you don't want to think about it before you hand over this precious package of lovable—ow!"

Loki grinned and lifted his boot off of Tony's poor crushed foot.

"Son of Stark," the king said with a strange smile, "even if I were to say no, do you truly think Loki would no go and marry you anyway?"

"Uh, yeah, you're probably right. He would."

"It is a yes."

"Great! So I guess I'll need to pick out a dress for him and—god dammit your feet weight a thousand pounds!" Tony shrieked at Loki, pulling his abused foot away with a snuffle.

"No dresses," Loki hissed and pulled him away from the king, "and that is quite enough out of you."

"I, *whoa*, okay." Tony stumbled after him and waved back at the Allfather, who was standing there looking completely bemused. "Where are we going?"

"Anywhere and everywhere."

"Well, we do have forever to do that. Where are we going now?."

"Yes, forever to see all of the nine realms," Loki agreed, looking back at the man who fell from the sky into his arms and who he would never let go of again. "but for now, home."

They bid Asgard goodbye with a promise to return for Loki's return celebration and the wedding.

Tony smiled as he watched the rainbow of the Bifrost colors swirl around him, and for just a moment he thought he heard music. As soon as he tried to strain his ears, the sound was gone. But even as they landed on the roof of his tower, the ghost of a melody lingered in his mind like a farewell from an old friend.

As predicted, Pepper smacked him before everyone in the group fell on them both in a heap of sobbing, hugs, and laughter.

It was good to be home.

1,100 miles away, a man was on a beach in the Bahamas. If you looked at him long enough to make it past the deadly glare, you would see just how out of place this man was.

Gone were his usual leather jacket, his black, steel-toe boots, and his giant floating heli-carrier. Because that's what happens when you're fired from your director's position in SHIELD. They take away your toys.

He still had the eyepatch, hidden behind a pair of dark sunglasses. For a man who was supposed to be 'relaxing', he looked a lot more like a guard dog than a beach bunny.

But even the sun, sand, and sea had a way of wearing down the stiffest of men. His gaze softened, and a small hint of a genuine smile had started to form.

His only warning was a small vibration from his pocket before his own voice filled the air.

"Loki's ass, Loki's ass, Loki's ass, Loki's ass—"

"Mother fucker, how the *fuck* did he do that?" Fury hissed, pulling out his phone to see a message in his inbox. He paused at the image on his screen and let out a short bark of laughter.



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"Yeah, yeah. Happily ever after, you assholes."

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